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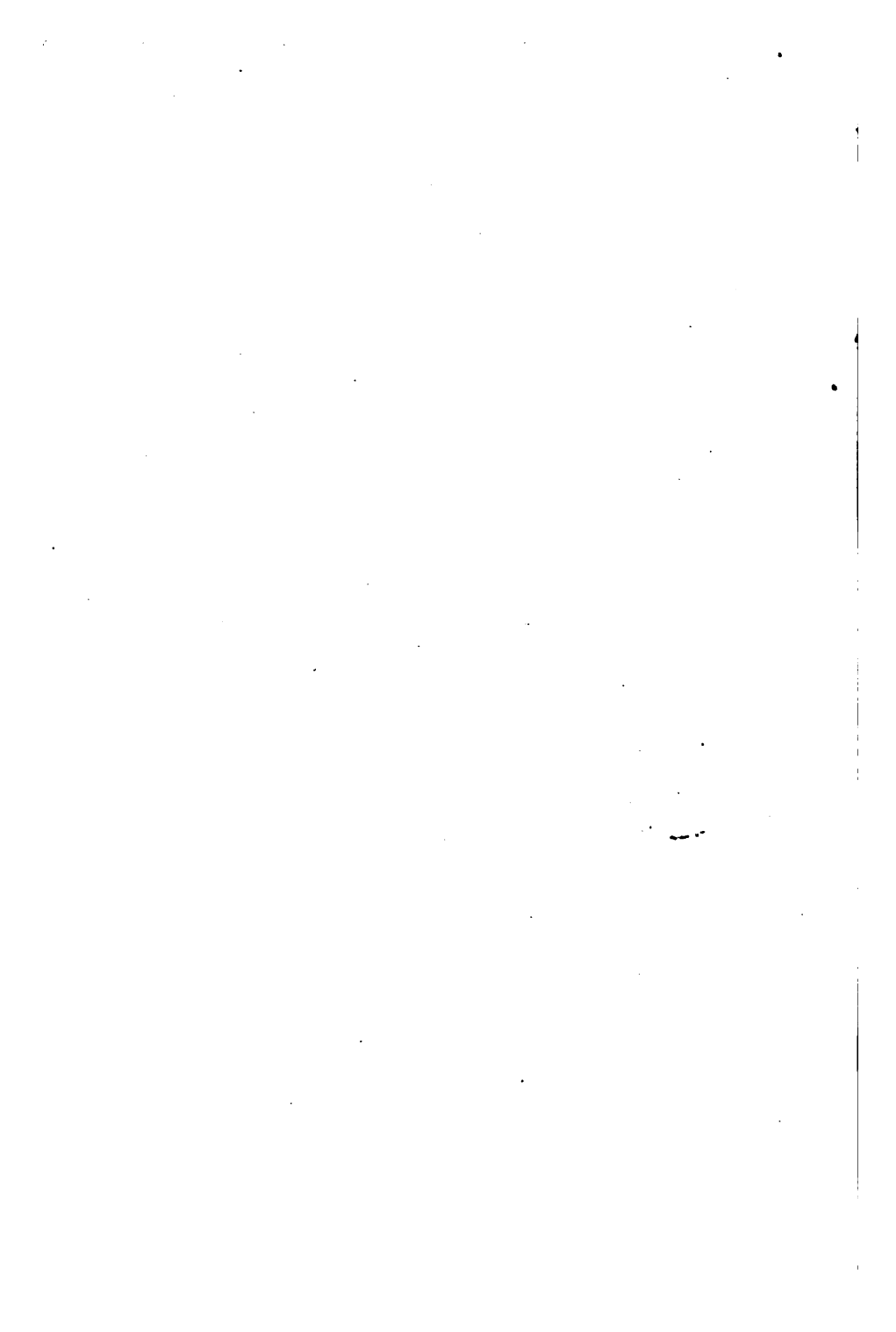
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# **HOLLOWHILL FARM.**



# HOLLOWHILL FARM.

A Novel.

BY

JOHN EDWARDSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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# HOLLOWHILL FARM.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A SNOW STORM.

**T**HE bitter December blast beat furiously against the window of a lone cottage situated on a rocky eminence on the coast of Bankshire. The few panes of glass still remaining, rattled unceasingly, whilst every fresh gust threatened to blow into the room the old rags—remnants of hats, stockings, &c., which did duty for the missing panes.

Above the roar of the wind, the raging of the sea was plainly to be heard, as it

boiled and surged against the rocks beneath, sending showers of spray high into the air, and far away on the wings of the tempest, over bog and moor fen and field for many a mile.

It is midnight—as the night wears on, it becomes darker and darker, for a heavy snow storm has set in, and were it not for the glimmer of light in the cottage, you might pass within five yards of it and never see it.

Let us raise the latch and enter the hut, it deserves no better name. We are in a low narrow room, with an earthen floor, and earthen walls; rafters, black, and half rotten with age support the ceiling, a board with either end resting upon an empty barrel, is evidently the table; the heap of heather and rushes in one corner of the room, half concealed by a thick coarse boatman's cloak, must be the bed.

A large oaken chair, supported by four great stones (for it has no legs of its own), stands on one side of the fireplace; on the other is a huge block of hollow wood, once the base of a stately tree—now a mere shell.

On a plank, resting upon more heaps of stones, are three cups, a few knives, forks, and plates, a stone bottle with a tallow candle stuck in its mouth, and a yellow jug without a handle and with but half a nose; these, with a wooden chest, an iron pot, and a pair of large rusty tongs, complete the catalogue of furniture in the room.

A more comfortless abode could scarcely be imagined, and yet, strange to say, there was an air of comfort throughout the apparent desolation. Everything was scrupulously clean; even the old tongs, though half eaten away with rust, were free from dirt, and glowed in the light of the brilliant turf fire.

It was, after all, this blazing fire, shedding its genial warmth and light through the wretched apartment, that neutralized in a great degree the look of penury and want, which were at first sight so disagreeably apparent.

Ah! there is great virtue in a good fire. I have heard some say that they would rather go without a dinner than without a fire on a cold night. I offer no opinion on the subject, although I have one, and a strong one too. I am content to leave it an open question, merely observing that I doubt whether the fire-worshippers would find the practice as easy as the theory.

Be that as it may, a good fire is a glorious addition to a cold winter's night. You expand under its kindly influence, your pinched up features regain their pristine comeliness, the furrows of your brow

relax, and you smile good humouredly even upon a pair of rusty tongs.

A rickety ladder stands in the farthest and darkest extremity of the room; we ascend and enter another apartment of the same size as the one below; it seems full of what is technically called lumber; old barrels, broken oars, bits of tarpaulin, rat-eaten ropes, and mice-eaten nets being scattered about in all directions.

The tidy room and blazing fire below, proclaim the recent presence of inhabitants in this lone hut—where are they?

On a shelving rock overhanging the sea at a height of some two hundred feet, stands the figure of a man; a rough pilot-coat envelops his form, one hand grasps a thick stick, shod with an iron spike; with the other he bends down the broad brim of his wide-awake, to keep the blinding snow from his eyes.

He is looking intently down into the depths below, he stoops forward, leaning upon his spiked staff: "I can neither see for the snow, nor hear for the thunder of the breakers; I *must* go down, I can bear this no longer," he mutters.

The cliff, upon the summit of which he stands, is almost perpendicular, and smooth as a wall, save where deep indentations, partly caused by the repeated falling of portions of the cliff itself, partly the natural formation, furrow the surface in all directions. Of these inequalities, the cupidity and ingenuity of man had taken advantage, and a zigzag path had been hewn out of the hard rock and crumbling chalk along the very face of the precipitous descent. In daylight, a stout heart and a steady hand were needed by him who would attempt that hazardous path; although on a moonlight night, in days "lang syne" a



string of adventurous men (each with a small tub or package strapped to his back), might have been seen picking their way cautiously and slowly up "smuggler's track," as this path was called, and familiarity with the perils of the way, added to long practice, had induced some of the most daring to brave the ascent on a still, dark night, when neither moon nor stars shone in the heavens, for darkness was to them a protection; but never a one of that hardy band would have ventured on the perilous path, with the blinding snow in his eyes, and a raging storm around him.

The power of money is great, but the power of love is still greater.

Fixing his staff firmly in the ground beneath, the stranger lowers himself cautiously—never losing hold with his hand, before securing another with his staff. Well does he know the fearful risk he

runs. The darkness is too intense to see on what the iron spike rests, it may be but a rugged inequality on the cliff's face wide of the path, if so, a terrible and instantaneous death awaits him. Slowly and surely he may be crawling over the edge of a precipice; this probability is ever before him, and yet his brave heart quails not, his nervous limbs tremble not.

On and on he crawls, now stopping a moment to dash the snow from his eyes, now vainly striving to pierce the thick impenetrable gloom.

Surely He who knows the hearts of men, had cast his merciful protection around that brave spirit, how otherwise could his frequent and miraculous escapes from the certain destruction which yawned beneath, be accounted for.

Now he hangs upon the brink of a precipice, nor knows how death and he are face

to face, till feeling with his staff for further foothold, it encounters space, and space alone.

Then is his hand guided aright by an arm more powerful than his own; then is his young life spared, for he imperils it in a good cause.

"I should be near the place by this," he murmurs, as he pauses once again, and once again listens eagerly.

The whirl of the wind and the bellowing of the waves alone meet his ear.

He moves forward; cautiously and slowly he advances—ha! the spike slips from off the treacherous rock—he falls!—he is lost! But his nervous hand still holds fast to the rock above, and he feels around him with his staff for a firmer resting-place. "God protect me!" he mutters; "the path must be more to the right."

Brave heart! brave heart! go on—if

thy danger is great, thy trust is greater, and God *will* protect thee.

A few minutes more of this terrible journey and he once again halts; he places a small silver whistle to his mouth, but ere a sound escapes, a vivid flash gleams before his eyes, followed by an instantaneous report.

During the whole of his fearful descent he had never been in such imminent peril as at that moment.

The suddenness and nearness of the flash cause him to start and stumble; he falls forward: for an instant despair usurps the place of faith, another, and his downward course is arrested, and a pair of strong arms are around him.

"I can scarcely believe the evidence of my own senses; is it indeed you, Cecil?" says his preserver, examining the face of our rash and adventurous friend by the

---

light of a huge torch. His large frame shakes with dread as he speaks—dread and horror at the thought of the path down which he knew his visitor must have come.

A smile of great sweetness plays over the pale face of Cecil, and the light of love shines in his eyes as he replies: "Why are you surprised to see me? I told you that if you did not come to me, I should come to you."

"But in such a hurricane—such a fearful storm—how dare you? it was a wilful tempting of Providence!"

"It was a trust in Providence. God guided me, Rupert."

"And I nearly slew thee, my brave, my heroic, my beloved——"

"Brother!" said Cecil, as his preserver strained him again and again to his breast.

"I should have fired off the signal gun to stop you an hour ago, had I not thought

that your attempting the descent to-night was out of the question; and besides, I was not sure that you would either see the flash or hear the report through this blinding, deafening hurricane. Were you watching for it?"

Cecil smiled an affirmative.

"And because you did not see it you came? Oh, Cecil! how nearly my folly had destroyed you?"

"Never mind, dear Rupert; I am glad, very glad, I did come—don't look so miserable and contrite—I am safe now, thanks to God and your strong arm."

He put his hand on the tall man's shoulder, and smiled affectionately into his handsome, though at present rather lugubrious countenance.

"How is he?" asked Cecil after a slight pause.

"Better—worse—I don't know, and I

scarcely care. When I think of you risking your life for such as he, I feel half-inclined to pitch him into the sea and have done with him."

"Have you got the book?" asked Cecil, interrupting him.

"I have."

"How?"

"Laudanum; he is sleeping it off now."

"Have you examined it?"

"Yes; and it is, as we expected, full of papers which the worshipful Stephen Bleer would give a handsome sum to lay his hands upon."

"That's well. It is not on *his* account I come to-night, Rupert, but on *yours*."

"On mine?"

"Yes, on yours; they are on our track?"

"On *my* track, you mean?"

"On *ours*—yours is mine; listen Rupert. Two men dressed as sailors, suddenly made

their appearance at the cottage early this morning. I saw at the first glance that they were not sailors; at the second, that they were constables; at the third, by the description you had given me of them, that they were Robert and Tom Cuff, although I had never before seen the men in my life."

"What, the 'Handcuffs?'"

"Exactly so, the 'Handcuffs,' as they are popularly called; there was no mistaking their red heads, and round impudent eyes."

"They were not impudent to you, Cecil?" exclaimed Rupert, fiercely.

"Yes they were, and so was I to them, and I think I had the best of it, so keep your temper, dear Rupert. At first they were civil enough, then they asked for something to drink, and talked of the weather, but when I gave them nothing but cold



water and short answers, they became impertinently inquisitive; asked me how long I had lived in the cottage, and whether I lived alone—how I liked it, and whether I was not afraid of staying in such a savage, out of the way place, and many more questions of the same description.”

“Well! and what did you say, Cecil?”

“I said that I had been at the cottage ever since I arrived there—that I was alone, except some one was with me, that I liked it very much, and that I was afraid of nothing.”

“That last is as true as holy writ,” said Rupert with a laugh. “What next? how did the curs take that?”

“Why they snarled and showed their teeth, which was foolish, for they dared not bite. One of them, Robert, I think (it was the ugliest, and I have always heard that Robert Cuff had the advantage in that

respect) Robert said, 'Come, come, young man, civil questions deserve civil answers; your manners are no better than your boots, they both want mending;' and the fool laughed as though he had said something very witty."

"Well, it was not bad, Cecil, it was not a bad hit," said Rupert, smiling provokingly. <sup>19</sup>

"No, I suppose not; it was true too, as far as my boots were concerned at all events, and doubtless that was the reason it angered me."

" 'We are the boys to mend both,' said Tom Cuff. I felt, and I suppose looked disgusted, for he laid his great coarse hand upon my knee, and said, 'Come, my lad, don't sulk about it.' 'How dare you?' I cried, pushing him from me with all my force, and the next moment, the man was sprawling on the floor."

"Oh, Cecil, how could you?"

“Because I was an idiot, and forgot myself. I saw in an instant the mistake I had made. Tom got up, looking red and wrathful as a highland bull; his brother also rose from the old root upon which he had seated himself, and for a moment I thought they were both going to attack me. I sat perfectly still, and fixed my eyes upon Tom, who was shaking with rage; somehow or other, his eyes fell, and his anger seemed to evaporate, after we had stared each other in the face (a scornful smile flitted across the countenance of the speaker); in fact, I saw that the fellow was afraid—afraid of a single antagonist, though backed by his bully of a brother.”

“I am not surprised,” said Rupert, “if the dangerous light gleamed in your eyes that I saw there once, and once only. It made my flesh creep I know, though it was not turned on me.”

It is impossible to describe the mixture of calm indifference and contempt with which Cecil told his story; indeed, contempt of danger and carelessness of consequences were the marked characteristics of his whole bearing. His voice was low and musical, and although there was habitually a dash of irony in almost all he said, it had so fine an edge, and cut so clean, that many a dull and obtuse subject had been sliced into shivers, without feeling either pain or punishment during the operation.

And now, as he leaned his slight form against the side of the cave, his arms crossed over his chest, who could guess by looking at his marble countenance, or listening to his steady voice and careless tone, that he was telling a tale which had imperilled not only himself, but all he held most dear on earth. The chiselled features betrayed no

expression of fear for the dangers he had run, or joy at his deliverance ; a scornful curl of his lip when speaking of the two Cuffs, and a look of deep affection in his large grey eyes when they met Rupert's, were the only visible signs that he was at all interested in the story he was relating.

He smiled at Rupert's last remark. "I suppose Tom Cuff's flesh crept too, for instead of striking me, as I quite expected, he merely holloaed into my ear, (I will not repeat the oath he begun with)—

" 'What do you mean by that, eh? If you was a bit bigger I'd teach you to touch your betters, that's what I would.'

" 'I beg your pardon,' I said, 'I did not mean to hurt you, but—but I don't like to be touched.'

" 'Don't like to be touched?' roared Bob, as you call him. 'Why Tom only put his hand on your knee, in a friendly way too,

—one would suppose you was a woman, with your “don’t like to be touched.””

“‘There you’re out, Bob; a woman would never have said it, she’d a knowed better, ha, ha!’ and the brute leered and looked so—so insolent, that, Rupert, you must forgive me, I could not bear that look. I got up, opened the door near which he was standing, and desired him to leave the house instantly; he hesitated a moment, and only a moment, then, turning to Robert, I pointed the way he should go, and he went; but he shook his fist at me when he was safe outside, and said, as plainly as rage and fear would permit—

“‘You’ve not seen the last of us, young chap, so don’t you think it; we’ll be back.’”

“My ire was roused, and I made a step forward, upon which he broke off short and followed his brother. I am very sorry, dear Rupert, for giving way so thought-

lessly and foolishly; oh, how I have schooled myself to bear whatever might happen, to despise it—to pass it by—and yet I cannot; all else can I bear unmoved, in appearance at all events, but a tone, a look, such as—such as——”

“If you could but remember, dear Cecil, that the tones and looks which disgust you so much, *cannot* in reality be intended for *you*.”

“I know, I know; I remember it now, though never at the right time. But you forgive me, Rupert?”

“Forgive you! I love you the better for it, and I hate to condemn with my lips, what I commend in my heart. Oh, Cecil, it drives me mad to think that you should be exposed to such insults, and I not by.”

“I am glad you were *not* by, you would have half-killed those men, and betrayed yourself,” said Cecil, smiling at his im-

petuous anger. "In the present instance," he continued, "I really believe my imprudent violence has done good instead of harm. In the somewhat hasty exit made by Tom Cuff from the cottage, a paper fell from his pocket, which certainly he never intended to leave behind him; I saw it fall and put my foot upon it, before the sharp eyes of his brother perceived what I was about: here it is."

"Ah! a copy of the 'Hue and Cry,' I see," said Rupert, as he took the paper and eagerly examined it.

"Yes," said Cecil, pointing to a particular paragraph, "and a very accurate description you will find it."

Rupert read as follows:—

"*'Five hundred pounds reward! will be given to any person who will arrest or cause to be arrested and lodged in safe custody, Colonel Jacob Dimdale, who has*



been guilty of embezzlement to an immense extent, and has fled from justice. Colonel Dimdale is between sixty and seventy years of age, tall and thin; stoops slightly in his walk, has a sallow complexion, iron-grey hair, long mustachios dyed black, and small, restless black eyes; no beard. Colonel Dimdale will probably endeavour to escape to America from some western port.

“ ‘Also *One hundred pounds* reward will be given for *Rupert Vicars*, his confederate in crime, and the companion of his flight; they are supposed to be together. *Rupert Vicars* is a man of immense frame and stature, with fair complexion, light, curling hair and blue eyes, age about thirty-five.’ ”

“Two very good portraits of what we were when last you saw us, Mr. Stephen Bleer, for I take it this is your doing, but

not particularly striking likenesses at present, eh, Cecil?"

"His stoop and your height remain the same as ever," replied his companion.

"Pooh! do you think no one stoops but the Colonel? or is six feet two but me? 'Age thirty-five,' ha! ha! the fellow knows my age to a day, if he knows nothing else, and he shall not know much else, either, if I can help it."

At that moment, a rustling sound was heard issuing from the furthest extremity of the cave, at the mouth of which they were standing, and a sharp, harsh voice called out, "Rupert Vicars, Rupert Vicars, whom are you talking to? who is it, I say?"

"It is Cecil, Colonel; he has brought bad news, I am sorry to say; those fellows are on our track."

"What fellows?" cried Colonel Dimdale

starting up from a bed of straw and rushes, with a face as pale as death."

"The constables. Cecil says that two of them——"

"It's no use, it's no use, I am sure to be taken; I always said so, I always told you so; I might as well give myself up at once; better, better do so than die like a dog on a dunghill, or a toad in a hole," and the wretched man threw himself back on his miserable bed, and groaned aloud.

"Never say die; you give in too easy, Colonel."

"Those who are not sick always preach patience. You wouldn't take it easy if you were in my place, I expect," was the rough reply.

"Yes, I should; I take everything easy, even your ill temper. As for giving yourself up, Sir; you have only to say the word, and the thing is done."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that as soon as it is light enough, Cecil and I will conduct you to the top of the cliff, and back to the cottage; the constables will be sure to return there, when you can give yourself up, you know."

"Rupert Vicars! Rupert Vicars! do *you* desert me? you?—and yet, why not?" cried the old man savagely. Then, suddenly sinking his voice, he whined out in the most abject tone, "But no, no, Rupert! kind Rupert! you will not desert, you will not betray me; I am an old man, a feeble old man, but I have means, I have money, that is, I could borrow, I could beg the loan of moneys to reward you, good Rupert, I could."

"That will do, Sir," said Rupert, sternly; "now listen to me. You have no means, no moneys to bribe or reward me with, and if you had, I would not accept a farthing."

A peculiar smile passed over the cunning features of the Colonel.

“Put your hand in your breast pocket, Sir,” continued Rupert.

He obeyed—“Robber!” he yelled, as the hot blood suffused his hitherto cadaverous countenance — “robber! thief! give me back my book.” He sprang at Rupert’s throat, and grappled with him.

As well might he have closed in deadly combat with the rocks around him; true, the fear of losing his ill-gotten gains, imparted a courage and strength foreign to his nature, but it was the strength of the bulrush against the bull.

“Lie down, Sir,” said Rupert, placing his open palm on the old man’s breast, and forcing him quietly back; “lie still and listen: when I consented to aid your escape from England, it was with the clear understanding that you would give up whatever

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papers or moneys you might possess which were not legally your own. You solemnly swore that you possessed nothing of the sort, and, as you are a gentleman, of course I believed you!" (A withering smile of scorn curled Rupert's lips.) "Circumstances have occurred since which led me to suspect that you had not told the truth. Last night I put laudanum in your brandy, and whilst you slept I took this book from your breast-pocket; you need not try to get it back, Colonel Dimdale—pooh!" he said, as the wretched man, maddened by the sight of his dearly loved treasure within his very reach, made a desperate grab at it,—“pooh! be still, Sir;" the strong hand pressed him back again. "I have examined its contents, and find that they consist of documents of immense value to their rightful owners, of whom you are not one, Colonel Dimdale; documents for the re-



covery of which a large sum of money would assuredly be given. A sum large enough to keep you in affluence in America for the remainder of your days; but——”

“Rupert,—good Rupert!—it is true, it is true; let us go! You shall share with me, that is, you shall have a portion, a goodly portion; say a fourth part—or even a third, nay—it shall be the half; we will share and share alike!”

With clasped hands and straining eyeballs, in hurried and choking accents, he poured forth his villanous proposal, increasing the amount of the bribe in proportion to the hardening of Rupert's countenance.

“By the Lord! this is too much!” cried the latter, furiously. “I told you so, Cecil, one can't touch pitch without being defiled. Because we have agreed to get him out of the country, he thinks we are no

better than himself, and I don't know that we are for that matter; we are breaking the laws as well as he," he added, bitterly.

"He is no worse than we knew him to be; why heed ought that he utters?" said Cecil, calmly and coldly. "I know that it is unlawful to aid him, nevertheless we *will*, we *must* do so; but these papers shall be restored to those to whom they belong, as soon as it can be done safely."

Colonel Dimdale's eyes were fixed on the speaker with an earnest, terrified gaze:—

"Who is that? who is it? I know that face! I know that voice!"

"Of course you do; it is Cecil Vicars. You have seen him day by day for the last week."

"Cecil Vicars! Cecil Vicars! *that* was not the name?" muttered the old man.

Cecil whispered a few words in Rupert's ear.

"As you please," said the latter, aloud.

Advancing a few steps in order to place himself directly in front of Colonel Dimdale, the young man took off his hat, removed the thin moustache which fringed his upper lip, loosened a fastening at the back of his head, and lo! the dark curling whiskers and incipient beard fell to the ground, dragging with them a mass of corkscrew curls, which, sailor-fashion, had adorned his cheeks, and revealing the smooth face and classically shaped head of a very young and very beautiful woman, whose rich auburn hair, released from control, fell in thick heavy waves over her neck and shoulders, contrasting strangely with the coarse pilot coat in which she was wrapped.

From the first moment the disrobing had commenced, the eyes of Colonel Dimdale had been fixed upon Cecil with painful intensity, and when the disguise fell off and

a woman confessed stood before him, his every feature seemed turned to stone.

His eyeballs glared but moved not, every line in his ghastly face was rigid as death, rigid with one expression—*fear*; the withering, crushing agony of mortal dread.

“You recognise me now, Colonel Dimdale,” said Cecil, in her usual calm tone. “I thought you could not have forgotten the face of *Cecil Meadows*.”





## CHAPTER II.

### PELTING A ROBIN.

**I**T is an ill wind that blows no one any good. The smack of the salt on the wet grass was grateful to Farmer Danger's cattle, and the smell of the salt water was pleasant in the nostrils of Farmer Danger himself, as he stood outside the door of his house at early morn, and sniffed up the fresh sea breeze.

The storm had passed away, its only evidence a white world. Already the crisp snow crunched beneath the farmer's feet; a severe frost had succeeded the tempest, hardening, congealing, drying the surface of all nature; every particle of wet had it

licked up, glazing the puddles with an icy film, arresting the liquid drops on bough and thatch in their downward course.

See how the sparkling crystals hang from yon aged yew! bravely his tough branches bear up against the snow weight which vainly strives to bend their stubborn strength.

Not so the laurels, whose drooping heads and broken boughs bear witness to their own feebleness and the storm's strength. Not so the palings around Farmer Danger's garden; flat on their faces they lie, half-buried in a deep snow-drift. One solitary post stands upright amid the ruins, on the top of which twitters a robin, as though to call the farmer's attention to the surrounding desolation; which idea seemed indeed to occur to the worthy man, for, catching up a clod of frozen earth, he incontinently threw it at his insulter, saying, with angry

emphasis, "Drat ye! do you think I can't see it without *your* help?"

The hapless bird disappeared, to reappear the next moment beneath a neighbouring shrub, upon whose fractured limb he perched and twittered with redoubled zest.

Another exclamation, more pungent, and a fresh clod of earth more powerful than the first, instantly saluted him.

"Whatever are you about, Richard Danger?" screamed a shrill voice from an open casement. "What are you a throwing stones at, like a great schoolboy, I should be glad to know?"

"Nothing," was the matter of course reply.

"What do you mean by 'nothing,' Richard Danger? You're not throwing stones at nothing, I suppose! Where's the use of telling a lie about it?"

With that, Mrs. Danger closed the window with a bang, and Mr. Danger thrust his hands into his breeches' pockets and whistled according to his usual custom on the like occasions, albeit his face was very red as he turned away to inspect his battered palings.

Hollowhill Farm was well named. It was situated between two ranges of hills. At the back were sloping downs, leading up to a broad table-land which stretched far away into the interior; in front, bog and moor divided the space pretty equally between them to the sea, which was some two miles distant. A large extent of natural wood, composed chiefly of dwarf oaks, mountain ash, birch and hazel, skirted the foot of the downs in rear of the farm; a brawling brook wound its devious course through the said wood, past Hollowhill, across the bog and marsh, until it



finally debouched upon the mighty ocean itself.

“All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; into the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.”

The speculative science of the day, now so rife and radiant, especially amongst the 'ologies, will surely take exception to this dictum.

The prevailing epidemic, the disease of disbelief in old and orthodox opinions, will be seen to couch down and run a-tilt against so mysterious an assertion, nor will they be turned aside in their mad career, by the sacred character of the Book from whence it emanates.

If neither in the Silurian, the Cambrian, the Devonian, nor the Carboniferous formations, evidence can be found to corroborate the return of the rivers to the place

from whence they came, of course they never did return !

Scripture must now be either corroborated by science or upset by it. Should they disagree, Scripture is always in the wrong, science never.

But, *revenons à nos moutons*, what has the pelting of a robin to do with geological formations, beyond, indeed, the clod that threatened him.





## CHAPTER III.

### A PAIR OF HANDCUFFS.

**P**OSSIBLY you have no sympathy with cold hearts; the sight of snow makes you shudder; leafless trees, brown grass, red noses, and chapped hands, are suggestive neither of comeliness nor pleasure.

Farmer Danger's nose was red, Farmer Danger's hands were chapped, and although his round face was ruddy with health, and his short squat figure proclaimed a species of clumsy strength, he was not altogether a picturesque object. We will therefore dismiss him within doors to his hot coffee, and his cold pie; for Dame Dorothy has

screamed forth, "Are you coming in to breakfast this morning, Richard Danger, or are you not?"

Ascend with me this knoll crowned by a group of fir trees, tall, gaunt and spectral they loom in their winding-sheets.

Now look forth over the bog and over the marsh; we are high enough up here to have a good view of the sea which bounds the distance; how glassy and quiet and peaceful it looks!—indeed, repose and peace are the characteristics of the whole scene.

How pure and colourless is the fresh fallen snow; as yet no stain of earth is upon it, the step of man has not destroyed its wavy undulating surface; but here and there objects arise to break the monotony of the view; a few turf ricks, a solitary fir tree, a flock of sheep huddled together and looking brown by contrast

with the surrounding whiteness; a herd of oxen standing knee deep in a drift, patiently awaiting their extrication.

Are these not picturesque features in the wintry landscape?

Mark the rough and broken ground that shuts in the valley. See how the black rocks and brown trees stand out in strong relief from their setting of snow. See how the heavy wreaths hang upon the boughs which, bending beneath the weight, dip into the dark waters of the silent pool. See the thin spiral column of bluish grey smoke from Hollowhill rising straight up into the still air.

Is such a picture without its attractions to you? is it dull and unprofitable?

Is it the glare of the snow or the biting cold that makes your eyes water? Surely it must be the latter that has brought that unpleasant looking tint into your face.

You have pulled the cuffs of your coat over your hands too, but not before I saw that they were as purple as your face.

You long for the fireside ; very good, we will go there.

Hollowhill farmhouse is a long, low, irregular building with a high tiled roof, gable ends, overhanging eaves and a low wide porch, with a wooden bench on either side, upon which, R. D., D. D., C. M., G. M. and other initials are cut more or less deep and with more or less accuracy, although I am bound to observe that very little artistic skill is displayed in the carving.

We pass through the porch quickly ; I say something about the length and beauty of the icicles which hang from the quaint old-fashioned gables, your answer is a shrug and a shiver ; and so partly pitying, partly despising you, I lift the latch of the kitchen door and enter.

You seldom see such a kitchen as this nowadays, no, nor such a farmer nor such a farmer's wife nor such a farmer's daughter.

"First of all, we will take a look at the room. It is, you perceive, like the house, long and low. Beneath the ceiling, thick beams black with age, cross and recross each other at uncertain intervals. Flitches of bacon, sides of pork and hams 'galore' hang from these massive supports. The whitewashed walls are garnished with a multitudinous assortment of pots and pans, glittering tin kettles and glowing copper saucepans. The "willow pattern" is worthily represented upon divers shelves. Upon the high narrow wooden mantel-piece, nearly as black with smoke as are the beams with age, stand two brass candlesticks brighter than gold, flanked on one side by a china shepherdess with flaxen

ringlets in a spotted dress very much open in front, a white wide-awake with a blue feather in it; and on the other, by a shepherd (of the same material) playing on the flute in a blue surtout, knee breeches and silk stockings. By this youth, repose a pair of large brass snuffers in a lackered tin tray; to counterbalance which, an enormous nutmeg-grater is judiciously placed by the shepherdess. There are also many other articles sacred to culinary purposes upon that shelf, but being unfamiliar with their classical names I prudently forbear any mention of them individually, beyond saying that spits and skewers are suspended over the heads of the shepherd and shepherdess, who, sooth to say, seem sadly out of place in such low company.

There are old-fashioned chairs of old-fashioned oak with a faded red cushion in



the biggest of the lot which stands by the chimney corner.

Ah! that chimney corner and that wide mouthed chimney and that great gaping fireplace and those huge iron dogs with their shining brass knobs—how my heart warmstothemall, the glowing woodashes and blazing logs! they remind me of my childhood and of potatoes roasting in the embers.

At a long table covered with the whitest of white cloths, four people are seated at breakfast.

Farmer Danger you know, by sight at least; to Dame Dorothy's voice you have also been introduced—behold her person. As she rises to fetch something from the fire, you perceive that she is tall, stout and good looking; from her appearance you would say she has no business to have a shrill voice but you know that she has, for you have heard it.

That is her daughter Jane buttering a muffin; they make their own muffins, these old-fashioned folks. She is like her father, short and stout with a red face; to each and all of these gifts of nature she strongly objects in her own mind, although this is a fact you will never discover by any disparaging observations on her part of the said gifts.

Opposite to Jane sits Grace Meadows, her cousin and her mother's niece, for Dorothy Danger had been Dorothy Meadows. Grace is very like her sister Cecil to whom you have already been introduced; in appearance I mean, for she is tall, straight and beautiful; but in strength of mind and force of will there is no resemblance between them. Grace might as well have jumped from the top of the cliff to the bottom at once as have attempted the descent which Cecil accomplished.

“And so you’ve been a peltin’ robins this mornin’, have you, Richard? instid o’ learnin’ your lessons, you bad boy, you—lor a mussy! it must ha’ been rare fun.”

This was said in a good-humoured tone, for Dame Dorothy’s temper, which had blurted forth into the fresh air through the open casement, had evaporated by the side of the kitchen fire. Indeed she had rather what is popularly called a quick than an actually bad temper; her “bark was worse than her bite,” as her husband observed when she had been barking rather louder than usual, but she shall speak for herself.

Mr. Danger’s mouth was too full of muffin to make more demonstrative reply to his wife’s jocularities than was comprised in a nod and a wink.

“Well, well!” continued the dame, “you take a sharp word easy, Richard, there’s no denying that; on’y if you’d choose

any time but meal time for your peltin', you'd happen not get so many of 'em, for you know I can't abide unpunct'al folk nor their doings neither; we all have our weak pints, an' that's mine—one of 'em."

"It's your strong pint, Dolly; you're quite right; folk should be puncshal, but I never was an' I'm afeared never shall be," replied Mr. Danger, who, luckily for the peace and quietness of Hollowhill, never lost his temper. He was as a cruse of oil to a flask of vinegar, an admirable combination but objectionable apart.

"Ay, ay!" responded Dame Dorothy, "'never was an' never shall be'—the old story, you allus seem to think that excoose enough let you be ever so late, but it ain't, not a bit of it. Where's Kattern I wonder!"

"You sent her to fetch some more turf, mother."

"I know I did, Jane; an' I'd leefer a gone for it myself if I'd thought she'd a been such a time about it; but it's allus the same, dawdle, dawdle, dawdle, with all of you; if I'd four pair of hands I'd rayther do all the work myself than trust to any one. Oh, here she comes at last! Well, Kattern, have you been to the bog to cut the turf, or what's kept you?"

"Shure, it's the snow's kep' me; the pate-stack's buried entirely wid it, an' I had to tear away iver so many sods afore I'd come on what was fit to burren; they're kilt wid the wet, so they are."

"Allus some good reason for loitering," mumbled Dame Dorothy. "Come, put a foo sods on the fire, an' sit down and have your breakfast, girl. Give me the muffins, Grace," she added in a mollified tone, for Catherine Doyle was a favourite with Dame Dorothy, and even when she scolded her

the tone of her voice seemed to lose somewhat of its usual harshness.

So Catherine Doyle put back her black hair, which in her turf-hunting zeal had escaped from its fastening, and down she sat to discuss the good things before her.

"Well, I must be off, an' see what damage the drift's done besides breaking down them pales," said Farmer Danger, rising from the table and stretching himself to his full width.

"Ay, ay, an' see a'ter the sheep an' bullocks, let alone my dairy cows, which is more consequence than bits o' wood. He doesn't mind me," continued Dame Dorothy, as her husband left the room, "and I'll wager a brass farthing he moigles about the pales there for ever so long, an' my cows getting their death o' cold all this time in a snow-drift; just like him—just like all of 'em."

"I sin the cows, the craythurs, from the

haggart beyent, up to their oxters in a dhrift; by the same token they're lowin' for help, an'——"

"Up to their hocks, not their oxters, you mean, Kattern; it's surprising the little English you've learnt since you've been here—three year come Michaelmas."

"'Ocks or oxters—I dunner which; but there's little to be sin av 'em save their horns, an' quare enough they look stickin' right up out o' the snow," laughed Catherine, showing her white teeth, her grey eyes sparkling "wid the fun o' the thing," as she would have said.

"It's my belief you'd laugh if we was all up to our necks in snow, in place of the cows; I never seen your equal for laughing, —mostly at the wrong time too."

"Faith! I'm sure I'd laugh—thruth is thruth—but I'd do my best to relase ye, so I would!"

“Well, I believe you would. Now girls, clear away the things; for any sake don’t sit with your hands before you the whole blessed morning.”

“Will I go help the craythurs out o’ the snow, missis?” asked Catherine, evidently longing for an opportunity of snow-balling the cows, an undertaking for which she looked able as well as willing; for tall as Mrs. Danger was, you could see as they stood side by side that the Irish girl was considerably taller, and that she was not wanting in strength was evident from the ease with which she had carried that heavy basket of turf; but she was doomed to be disappointed in her anticipated fun.

“No, no, Kattern, you get about your own business; there’s men enough on the farm to do theirs without your help. It’s little enough they have to do, and badly enough they do it; the pales was propped



up on'y last week, and now they're all strewed on the ground and broken to pieces likely."

By this specimen of the domestic manners of Mr. and Mrs. Danger, you will not fail to be struck by the immense inferiority of these worthy people to the generality of English farmers of the present day; and when I tell you that Mr. Danger did neither hunt nor shoot, that he had not a green cut-away coat in his possession, but that he dressed like a farmer and minded his farm and little else besides; that Mrs. Danger only wore a silk dress on a Sunday, that she had had no governess for her daughter, and that there was not such a thing as a pianoforte in the house, or any one who could play upon it if there had been; when I tell you all this, the whole family will probably sink so low in your estimation that you will not care to hear

any more about them, in which case shut up the book at once. I scorn to deceive you; this uninteresting family plays a conspicuous part in my story.

Farmer Danger and his men have been busy at work, sweeping and shovelling away the snow from various parts of the homestead. The violent wind in the night had caused great drifts, in some places six or eight feet deep, through which lanes must be cut to admit of a free passage for man and beast.

As the clock struck twelve, the farmer might be heard kicking his thick hob-nailed boots against the stone step in the porch, to knock off the snow.

Shortly after, he entered the kitchen, but not alone. "Here's Bob Cuff been giving us a hand a clearin' the snow away, and so I've brought him to dinner, dame; he's earned it too. Take a chair, Bob."

Truth compels me to acknowledge that Robert Cuff received by no means a hearty welcome from those present, save and except from Jane, who was never known to snub any unmarried human being of the male species, between the respective ages of eighteen and fifty, both inclusive.

Mrs. Danger was civil, but not pressing in her civility.

Robert Cuff, however, was not easily abashed, especially when hungry and in the presence of boiled pork, smoking cabbage and foaming ale; so he sat down, and placed his large dirty hands upon the clean tablecloth, which being observed by Dame Dorothy, gave rise to the following caustic remark—

“ There’s hot-water and a bit o’ soap in the back kitchen, Mr. Cuff; Kattern ’ll show you where they are.” No sooner was the door closed, than Dame Dorothy opened out—

"However, Richard Danger, you could bring that great dirty fellow in here to dinner, when you know I can't abide him, is more——"

A sudden noise in the back kitchen broke off the dame's attack.

It sounded very like the violent slap a cook gives occasionally to the dough she is kneading; then followed the crash of crockery, and then a peal of laughter from Catherine.

"Whatever in life are they two a-doing?" cried Mrs. Danger, hurrying to the scene of action.

Mr. Robert Cuff was busily employed picking up the bits of a smashed wash-hand basin; Catherine Doyle, standing with her arms a-kimbo, was laughing "fit to kill herself."

"I beg pardon for being so awk'ard," said Robert, as he raised himself. His face was very red, probably from the act of stooping, although that did not satisfac-

torily account for the fact that one cheek was considerably redder than the other—in the mind of Mrs. Danger, at least, who in her coldest of tones, said, “Never mind the basin, Mr. Cuff; have done, Kattern, have done laughing this minute, and go back to the kitchen; *I’ll* see that Mr. Cuff gets what he wants.”

When Mrs. Danger spoke slowly and coldly, she was really angry and not to be trifled with. Accordingly Catherine, stuffing her blue checked apron into her mouth, vanished at once—not into the kitchen, where she could not explode in safety—but into “the haggart beyent,” *anglicè*, the rick-yard.

Mrs. Danger said nothing with her tongue, but a good deal with her eyes to Robert Cuff, whose chapfallen and glowing face sank beneath the dame’s piercing gaze.

He washed his hands in silence, and they both returned to the front kitchen, followed shortly afterwards by Catherine Doyle, demure as a mouse, which unusual behaviour was a sign to those who knew her well, that a bit of fun was lying *perdu* in the secret recesses of her heart.

“Come now, sit down, Robert: bother the crockery—accidents will happen; sit down and have a mouthful afore it’s stone cold,” said the unsuspecting and hospitable farmer.

Robert Cuff’s appetite was not easily spoiled, and there is proverbially safety in numbers; so in spite of Dame Dorothy’s awfully keen eyes being continually upon him, he made a hearty meal. His waning courage was moreover supported and strengthened by the consciousness that he had a rod in pickle for the dame; the hope of vengeance restored, to a certain degree,

the just equilibrium of his small mind, which had been balancing to and fro between pork, greens and exposure, *versus* flight, abstinence and safety. The silence preserved by Catherine and her mistress also reassured him, so he stayed, and after eating a pound or two of fat pork, and draining a corresponding quantity of "humming ale," he even plucked up courage to ogle Jane Danger with his little twinkling eyes, and to leer at Grace Meadows, when Dame Dorothy's back was turned. Of Catherine he took no notice, which seemed to afford her great amusement, judging by the difficulty she evidently had to sustain her novel character for demureness and sobriety.

"Well, Robert, what's the noos?" asked Mr. Danger, as he filled his after-dinner pipe.

"Why, there be a bit o' noos; the Cliff House—but mayhap you've heerd it?"

"Heard what?"

"Why, that it's took, there's people in it—leastways there's one, an' I expect there's more."

"What people? Not smugglers, I hope; we've been tolerable free of those gentry of late years, more's the luck," said Mrs. Danger.

Robert Cuff understood and appreciated this delicate allusion to his own misdeeds.

"You're allus 'ard on me, Mrs. Danger; I was but a boy in them days, an' I hopes I knows better now."

"Yes, yes, Dorothy; let bygones be bygones," said Mr. Danger.

Dame Dorothy smiled grimly, but said nothing.

"Well, but what about the folks as has took the Cliff Cottage, Robert? they must ha' been badly in want of a house to take that," said the farmer.



"I expec' they *was* put to it for a place to 'ide in ; for though they b'aint smugglers, they be as bad, or may be worse, one on 'em."

This announcement brought forth a string of questions from the farmer. Mrs. Danger, however, remained silent; feeling certain by the malignant glitter in ugly Bob's small eyes, that he had a piece of unpleasant news to communicate, and was gloating over the same, she would not give him the satisfaction of supposing that she was at all interested in the matter, but began to busy herself about her household concerns.

Robert Cuff related his adventures at the Cliff Cottage.

"An' so you couldn't make out much from the young feller you see?" said the farmer.

"Why, no, not for sartin', but I guessed some'at."

"Ay! and what did you guess, Robert? had you seen the young chap before?"

"No, and I don't care if I never see him agin; he'd no more manners than an 'og; but I owe 'im one, an' I'll pay it too."

"What, the hog turned you out of his sty, eh, Bob?" laughed the farmer.

"He—that is, I didn't choose to stop with the feller, but it 'ud a took a dozen of he to make me go agin my consent I expec'."

"Especially with Tom to back you," silyly suggested Mr. Danger. "Well, but what did you make of it all, Bob? that's what I want to know."

"Which of you reached home soonest, Robert, you or Tom?" asked malicious Dame Dorothy, who found herself listening in spite of her determination to the contrary.

"Soonest? why me—no, Tom; how should I know who got home soonest?"

“Well, I’m glad the young man didn’t hurt you, Robert; to fright you out of your wits is bad enough. I’m main glad he did’nt slap your face for you, as he might have done.”

The part of Robert Cuff’s person here indicated, glowed with a radiance scarcely surpassed by his hair, at this insult, more especially as the clear ringing laugh of the incorrigible Catherine echoed the taunt.

That Robert Cuff was not brave, you already know; he was easily cowed—all blusterers are; but now he turned, like a rat in a corner, on his enemies.





## CHAPTER IV.

FARMER DANGER SCRATCHES HIS HAT.



AME DOROTHY'S remark and Catherine's laugh had struck home.

Robert Cuff could not parry the blow, it had already reached its mark; the shaft was even then sticking in his flesh; there let it stick—there let it quiver, he would not attempt to drag it out against the barb, he would “grin and bear it,” uncomplainingly, but not tamely. No, he had “a shot in his locker,” he flattered himself, and out it came in the shape of a long narrow slip of paper, something like the announcement of “The unrivalled eques-

trian company from *America!* *Mr. Blowhard* will enter the town of *Forkout* driving *one hundred* horses in hand!! &c. &c. &c.” Or, “*Mr. and Mrs. French Rush* have the honour to announce to the nobility and gentry of *Gawkwell*, &c. &c.—direct from *Windsor*, &c.—by *Her Majesty’s* command, &c.”

But the long narrow slip of paper, produced with much apparent hesitation but real delight, from the capacious pocket of Robert Cuff, although most certainly printed and issued “by Her Majesty’s command,” was of a perfectly different character from the announcements either of Mr. Blowhard, or of Mr. and Mrs. French Rush, being, in fact, a copy of the “Hue and Cry,” with the contents of which you are already acquainted.

“You see,” said Robert Cuff, turning pointedly to Mr. Danger, thus evincing not

merely contempt for his fair tormentors, but as it were an entire forgetfulness of their existence; "you see I'm in the habit of puttin' two an' two together, and this 'ere bit o' paper and the onaccountable appearance of that young feller at the Cliff Cottage put me a thinkin'; an' so I jest come over 'ere, for I thought you ought to know what was a-goin' on, though I'm afeared it'll maybe trouble you."

With that he placed the copy of the "Hue and Cry" in the farmer's hand, casting at the same time a furtive and malicious glance at Dame Dorothy and her attendant satellite.

The farmer's countenance changed visibly as he read; Mrs. Danger, Grace, and Catherine stood leaning over the back of his chair, their eyes also eagerly fixed on the paper; and if disturbed and agitated countenances and looks of dismay and

grief and shame, could gratify and soothe the irritated feelings of Robert Cuff, they certainly ought to have been lulled into calm repose.

Dame Dorothy turned pale, bit her lips hard, and sat down; Grace and Catherine flushed scarlet; the farmer frowned and tried to look ferocious. No one spoke a word for several minutes.

At length Mr. Danger said, "What steps have you took, Robert, about this business?"

"Well, me an' Tom being constables, you see, was bound to foller it up; so we goes to the cottage this mornin' jest as it was light; we sin the young feller, and told 'im as 'ow we'd a s'arch warrant and must s'arch the house; an' so we did, from top to bottom, but we didn't find nothin' nor nobody as we wanted, an' so as we'd no writ agin the young feller who calls hisself

Bill Williams (though I don't believe as it's his real name) why we jest left him alone an' come away."

"And what do you mean to do next?" asked Mr. Danger, tremulously.

"Why, I don't jestly see what the next move should be, and it were partly to ask your advice I come 'ere this mornin', an' partly becuse I thought you'd better, maybe, hear the noos from me than from a stranger like."

This friendly act appeared not to be duly appreciated, judging from the silence which followed its announcement.

Presently Robert Cuff observed, in a somewhat bitter tone, as though hurt by the want of gratitude on the part of his listeners, "We shall watch the 'ouse sharpish, of coorse; there'll nobody goo in nor goo out as we shan't see 'em, either Tom or me."



"You'll do your dooty, no doubt, Robert Cuff," said Mrs. Danger, speaking for the first time since her eye had fallen on the "Hue and Cry;" "and I must do mine. You won't take it uncivil if I ask you to go now, Robert, and let me and my girls tidy up a bit, for what with one thing and another, we're terrible behind-hand this morning."

Dame Dorothy strove hard for composure as she spoke, but her lip quivered though her voice was firm, and "ugly Bob," when he got into the open air, rubbed his hands together and chuckled gleefully to himself. "Tit for tat, dame," he muttered, as he walked rapidly along; "a man can't 'zactly slap a woman's face, but he can slap her feelin's, which is wus, some says, though for my part I misdoubt it. Ay, ay, Miss Kattern, I'll pay you off for that lick, never you fear: what a strong-

fisted wench 'tis. May I never! but she made my eyes dance like nothin', and my ear sing like a kettle at full bile: 'andsome gal, with no end of a temper, and supprisin' powerful."

Thus summing up the perfections and imperfections of Catherine Doyle, Robert Cuff pursued his way, which we will leave him to pursue alone, and rejoin the party at Hollowhill Farm.

"I don't know whether I'm most angered or ashamed," said Dame Dorothy, her white lips trembling as she spoke; "the name of that man, Jacob Dimdale, allus gives me a turn of the inside; it's worse than swinging, which is a disgrace to a Christian country—whoever invented it ought to be ashamed of himself—exposing one's legs and addling one's brains with the diderums. And that grinning fool, Robert Cuff, too! I saw him chuckling over

the bad news, pretending to be so vexed and so sorry; I wish you'd hit him twice as hard as you did, Kattern; I'd like to catch him trying to kiss *me*, he'd not get off with a box of the ear, *I* can tell him: I'd have knocked his ugly head off his shoulders, I would." Here Dame Dorothy paused, not for lack of words, but simply for breath, and the farmer took advantage of this opportunity to inquire what she meant about "kissing" and "boxing of ears."

Upon which Catherine explained what Dame Dorothy's acute perceptions had at once discovered, adding that in her indignation she had upset the basin "an' bruk it to smithereens," and Kattern's eyes sparkled, half with fury, half with fun, as she thought of the smash.

Jane Danger tossed her head, twisted her meagre curls round her fingers, and

observed superciliously that "some folk was for ever fancying that other folk was paying them attention, when likely they weren't thinking of them; Robert Cuff was never uncivil to her, but then she wasn't always a-twisting every word and act of a man into a compliment, as some folks were."

"Faith, if you're fond of them sort of attentions an' compliments you're welcome to my share of 'em, anyhow," laughed Catherine.

"Have done, Kattern," said Mrs. Danger; "I really b'lieve you'd laugh if the house was on fire;" then turning to her husband—"What do you mean to do, Richard Danger, about this business?"

"Why, what *can* I do, dame?"

"What *can* you do? why, a good deal; what *will* you do—why, nothing of course, or you wouldn't be you."

"Dang it all! it's easy to talk," said the farmer, scratching his head with energy and vexation; "but what *can* I do—you jest tell me that."

"You must get that fellow—that Jacob Dimdale—out o' the country, that's what you can do, and must do; but you wont do it by sitting sucking your thumbs by the fire."

"Unless I throw him over the cliff, I don't know any other way o' getting him out of the country," exclaimed the perplexed farmer.

"Throw him over and welcome for me; God forgive me for saying so; but don't talk nonsense, Richard; it's not for Jacob Dimdale as I'm anxious, as you know well; but if he's taken, Rupert Vicars will be taken, and—and you're none so dull of comprehension as not to know who that young fellow was as frightened the two

Cuffs—kicked 'em likely out of the Cliff Cottage—are you?"

Mr. Danger stared an acknowledgment of his ignorance on the point.

Dame Dorothy lifted up her hands and eyebrows in astonishment and contempt; "I couldn't have beleft it!" she exclaimed; "why you've no more penetration than a pat of butter! But you men are all alike, a strong-fisted, thick-headed lot, the whole of you. Grace, fetch my basket, there's a good girl, you'll find it in my room, it's full of work—and——"

"I'll fetch your basket if you want it, aunt; but if you only send me for it to get me out of the room whilst you tell uncle who it was that turned the Cuffs out of the cottage, I might as well stay where I am, for I know well enough that it was my sister Cecil."

If Farmer Danger stared before with his

eyes, he stared now with every feature he possessed.

"Your sister Cecil! your sister Cecil! what does the girl mean?" he asked.

"She means what she says, to be sure," replied the dame; "though how Rupert Vicars could let her go gadding about the country in man's clothes, and all for the sake of Jacob Dimdale, the biggest villain unhung, is unaccountable."

"But it is not on Colonel Dimdale's account alone, aunt, that Cecil is dressed as you say; remember, Rupert is in danger; surely she had a right to help her husband!" said Grace, her affection for her sister giving her unwanted boldness.

"Well, child, you're right so far; but it's all along of that old Dimdale as Rupert is in trouble; and instead of letting him shift for himself, they two must put their heads in the same noose as has caught him."

Farmer Danger was more abroad than ever; he turned from one speaker to the other, in hope of discovering a clue to the conversation, but in vain.

At length a light, or rather what he mistook for a light, but which was in reality only an "*ignis fatuus*," dawned upon him. He knit his good-humoured brow, with great difficulty, into a portentous frown.

"You don't mean to say that Cecil Meadows has any feelin' or likin' as she ought not to have for that feller—that Colonel Dimdale, do ye?"

"There it is again! allus wrong, I never saw the like of you men for being in the wrong—a liking for Jacob Dimdale, indeed!" (with a look of supreme contempt); "but Cecil is just like her mother before her. I have no patience with clever folks who have no common sense, with their



vows and their debts of gratitude—a pack of rubbish !”

“A pack of rubbish? ay! that it is, I wish you’d clear some of it away, dame; it’s all rubbish together to my mind,” said the perplexed farmer.

“In the first place,” began Dame Dorothy, “you know that Cecil Meadows, as you call her, is Cecil Vicars, don’t you?”

“O’ course—o’ course, I knowed she’d married Rupert—didn’t she write an’ say that happen she and Rupert would spend a week of their moon with us, and didn’t she say as she’d bring a piece of cake along with her, as it wasn’t worth sending so far?”

“Well, then, what call have you to suppose such a piece of outrageous folly as her having a liking for that shrivelled-up atomy Jacob Dimdale—an’ she a bride too! I really am surprised at you, Richard

Danger! such indelicate notions, and before Cecil's sister too, let alone your own daughter and Kattern."

"Well—well, dame, I were wrong, I own it, but I'm rarely puzzled to know what Cecil has to do with this here business of the Colonel's; an' when a man's puzzled, why, he doesn't allus speak as should be."

"I tell you she has a vow on her to befriend him—you know that as well as I do, Richard Danger. You know as this Colonel's father saved my father's life, don't you?"

"Yes—yes, now I see—now I see."

"Now you see! it's time you should—lor a massy, these men!—an' so as I was saying, nothing would do for sister Cecil, and she on her death-bed, but she must remind her daughters, both of them, Grace as well as Cecil, of all they owed the Dimdales, and she made them take their Bible oath, never to desert any member of

that family, but to help them, if need be, to the utmost of their power. They were not to let the evil doings of one of the family, meaning this Jacob, poison their minds against the rest—nor yet against him it seems, for my poor sister made special mention of him, so Cecil says—as being the most likely to get into trouble, I suppose—and so, as soon as ever that Robert Cuff—I'll Cuff him!—showed us the 'Hue and Cry,' and described the looks of the young chap at the Cliff Cottage, I knew 'twas Cecil *directly*."

"Ay, ay, dame, I see—I see, and Rupert is bound to help the Colonel, too, ain't he?"

"To be sure he is; the Vicars's owe everything they have to the Dimdale family, as you know, or ought to know, Richard Danger. Why, this Rupert's father was nothing but a private sentinel in a horse regiment before old Colonel

Dimdale, as was, took him by the hand and made a gentleman of him; and I *will* say that our Rupert, as I call him, for all he's so grand and so learned, ain't a bit stuck up, but is allus chatty and pleasant-like."

"Ay, ay; now I see—now I see, an' so if they catches the Colonel they'll catch Rupert and Cecil; and that don't suit your book, eh, dame?"

"No, nor yours nether, I should think."

"No, nor mine nether. Well, I'll see what can be done—yes—yes, I'll see what can be done; but whatever have Rupert been about to get his name i' the 'Hue and Cry,' and he but just married?"

"What has his marriage to do with it, Richard Danger? he's been consortin' with a rogue, that's what he's been about; not that I doubt Rupert's honesty, and you've no call to doubt it nether, but if you sleep in the stable, you'll smell of the stable.

That Jacob Dimdale is as cunning as a fox; he's managed now to drag Rupert into the dirt by some falsity or other; but how Rupert, knowing as he does the way that old villain treated his wife's family, *could* have anything to do with him, passes all belief! But that's nether here nor there; he's got into a scrape and we must help him out."

"Well, well, dame, I'll see what can be done—I'll see what can be done," reiterated Mr. Danger; "but them pales must be looked to." Accordingly the good man rose from his arm-chair and abandoned the field, devoutly hoping that Dame Dorothy would also see what could be done, for in truth his mind was in a state of Egyptian darkness with regard to any possible assistance he could afford the fugitives.

Dame Dorothy took advantage of a clear

stage ; she lamented with a great lamentation the surprising want of apprehension and the do-nothingness of men in general, and of her husband in particular. She then bewailed her unhappy fate in being born a woman, declaring that "had she had the luck to have been born a man, *she'd* not have let the grass grow under her feet, no, nor under nobody else's."

To say the truth, Dame Dorothy had nothing to reproach herself with on that score, even in her woman's nature. The inconsistency evinced by her wish to belong to the despised male portion of the creation, though doubtless transparent to you, was opaque to the dame, and herein she but followed what appears to be the inevitable law of our common nature, whether male or female ; neither did she belie the character for shrewdness which she undoubtedly merited. Sharp is the eye, and keen the

wit to detect and expose the faults and failings of others, but dull and blunt are both eye and wit when the subject to be carved or criticized is—self.

With what unerring accuracy we “hit the blot;” with what admirable precision we touch the sore place in a friend’s bosom; we put a finger upon it at once, there is no hesitation, for there is no doubt. In vain is the weak point, the bad habit, the foolish custom, the folly, the vice, the sin, surrounded and defended, guarded and concealed by armour of proof; from the feather-bed of self-conceit that smothers the darts of the censorious, to the brazen walls of effrontery which defy them. In vain, in vain are these fragile defences raised; you know your “dear friend” too well to be deceived; to your penetrating eye the feather-beds are transparent as glass; at your lightest touch the brazen walls crumble

into dust; you stretch forth your hand, and without let or hindrance you point out *vanity—hatred—malice—pride*.

You turn your eye inwardly, you place your hand on your own heart, and behold! all is *charity* and *humility*!

\* \* \* \*

Farmer Danger walked slowly, and thought slowly over all he had heard. His thumbs were stuck in the arm-holes of his thunder-and-lightning waistcoat, the war of the elements being ably represented by vivid hieroglyphics of black and yellow zig-zagging over the whole surface of the afore-said garment. By this disposition of the farmer's hands, his ample chest was fully exposed to the biting north-easter which was beginning to blow fiercely from the top of the distant hills; but Farmer Danger despised the blast: a good dinner and a pipe, and, above all, the process of thought under



which he was at that moment labouring, were sufficient protection against the cold even of that bitter day. He did not seem to care either, for the small, sharp, hard particles of frozen snow that ever and anon were collected by lilliputian whirlwinds and dashed into his rubicund countenance, which glowed all the brighter at each fresh assault, but with the exception of that acknowledgment, betrayed no further consciousness of the passing insults.

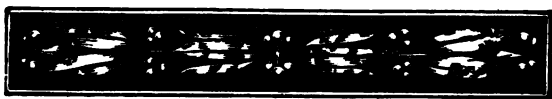
“Dang it,” cried the farmer, scratching his hat, as he could not get at his head; “dang it all! here’s a nice fix, here is; get him out of the country, indeed! Easy said, dame, but not so easy done, with the ‘Hue and Cry’ at his heels, an’ all them Cuffs too, allus a hangin’ about the place—as sharp-eyed as a ferret, that feller Bob—no gettin’ in nor gettin’ out, as he says, without his seein’ ’em.”

The good farmer walked on for a while in silent musing; then breaking forth into a new strain, standing stock still to do so, he thus apostrophized the snow-clad haystack before him: "To think"—releasing one hand and shaking his fore-finger ominously at the stack—"to think o' that girl, Cecil Meadows, leastwise Vicars, a-trapesin' about in men's clothes!—*she* to do't of all girls i' the world, and for such an old rascalion as the Colonel! Well, after all this I've no call to be surprised at anythin', nor wont be, nether; how-and-ever, I'll just step up to th' cottage an' see if it be Cecil after all; the dame may be mistook, though tain't often she is; truth is truth."

Having decided upon a course of action, although quite uncertain as to what result it might lead, the farmer buttoned his thick shaggy coat across his chest, grasped firmly

his stout blackthorn (a gift from Catherine Doyle), and proceeded at a quicker pace than was his wont along a rough stony path which wound upwards towards the top of the cliff.





## CHAPTER V.

### COLONEL DIMDALE HEARS THE HISTORY OF HIS PAST LIFE.



It was with great difficulty that Colonel Dimdale could be persuaded that Cecil was not an enemy in disguise. The daughter of Cecil Meadows, the Cecil Meadows of his youth, could scarcely be a friend to him; she *must* be there for the purpose of betraying him, of delivering him into the hands of the law—to be tried—convicted—disgraced—and transported for life. That fearful doom was ever before him—the doom of a *felon*—for life.

Poor coward!—poor miserable guilty

coward!—how despicable he looks, cowering down amongst the straw, his shaking limbs and terrified gaze attesting the palsied dread at his heart.

The half-starved wretch who steals a loaf or picks a pocket, to give food to his half-starved wife and children, may well command our pity with our condemnation; but what shall be said for a man who for years has pursued a system of heartless deception towards all who trusted him? who has brought ruin and desolation into hundreds of happy homes? who for years has battered upon the wealth of others—wealth not fairly obtained, wealth never his, but of which he has possessed himself by fraud and lies? And this, not to feed a starving wife, not to clothe naked children, but that he himself might lead a life of luxurious ease, perchance of profligacy, regardless of the wretchedness and misery which he well

knows must be the portion of his trusting dupes, his confiding victims.

For a hasty blow, a rash act, however fearful the result, there may be "extenuating circumstances," but not for a systematic course of heartless roguery, not for deep-laid schemes of self-enrichment at the expense of others—deep laid and long continued schemes, for the perfecting of which are prostituted the talents and energies that *God* has given—schemes of fraud and wrong, as remarkable for the ingenuity of their construction as for the heartless perseverance displayed in their execution; no, there can be no extenuating circumstances, no pity here.

And it was thus Colonel Dimdale felt as he gazed in fear and trembling upon the pale, calm countenance of Cecil Vicars.

"And so you have really come here to help me—not to deliver me up—not to

betray me! May I believe that—may I—may I?” gasped the old man.

“You may. I have promised, and I never break my word. But you owe me no thanks, sir, none; it is not on your account—not for your sake that I assist you,” said Cecil, interrupting an outpouring of gratitude from the pitiful object before her, whose sudden change from dastard fear, at the thought of danger, to childish glee at the prospect of escape, it was painful to behold.

“Ah! she does not, she cannot know all, or she could never help me,” muttered Colonel Dimdale, in a scarcely audible tone; but Cecil heard him.

“Yes, I know all, Colonel Dimdale,” she said—her white cheek was dyed crimson as she spoke, but only for a moment—“I know all, and I despise you as you deserve to be despised by me and mine; but I love

the memory of my mother even more than I hate you, and——”

“Cecil,” said Rupert, “*she* forgave him on her death-bed—she who had more to forgive than you.”

“I know, Rupert—I know: I hope I, too, may be able to forgive this man on my death-bed, at present I cannot. But let me say what I have to say at once and quickly, or the words will choke me.”

By a strong effort Cecil retained her composure, but her voice trembled and her cheek flushed as she turned again to the wondering old man, who was regarding her so steadfastly with his eager, anxious eyes.

“Colonel Dimdale,” she said, whilst her proud lip curled with scorn, and her upright figure quivered with hardly suppressed emotion; “Colonel Dimdale, I repeat that I know all. I know how you strove by every means in your power to deceive



and betray my mother, how she spurned you as you deserved to be spurned, and how you vowed to be revenged upon her. I know, too, how by spreading false and slanderous reports, you kept your word. My beloved mother's character was under a cloud, and for a time, people supposed her the vile thing you represented her to be. I know too, how her cousin, John Meadows, to whom she was engaged, heard the evil reports regarding his betrothed, disbelieved them, and never rested till he had obtained proofs, undeniable proofs, of her innocence, and of your guilt. The slanders were brought home to you, and the reason of your spreading them was made known. Then were you shunned by all your friends—for English gentlemen will not associate with one capable of such mean despicable conduct. I know, too, how John Meadows horsewhipped you at Boston races, for

calumniating the girl to whom he was betrothed. I see a blush of shame on your countenance as I recall to your recollection the disgrace of that chastisement; but you do not blush for the deeds which brought it upon you. Oh, man, man! strange indeed are thy notions of honour! the cut of that whip across thy shoulders will tingle in thine ears till all feeling is dead within thee; but to blacken a good name by cruel slanders in revenge for thy baffled villany is accounted no disgrace by thee and such as thee!"

Cecil paused, her agitation was great, but by degrees she controlled it and proceeded—

"From that day, John Meadows was marked by you for destruction; you dared not bring an action against him for an assault, as the cause would then have become more public than it already was,

and besides, a legal fine would not have satisfied your revenge; he must be destroyed—ruined—root and branch. His marriage with his cousin Cecil, which took place shortly afterwards, increased your hatred to them both. For many years your vengeance slumbered — slumbered because you could find no opportunity of injuring them. They were happy and prosperous, and might have been so still, but for you. My father's weak point was a love of speculation; this you knew and took advantage of. Your creature, Stephen Bleer——”

“Curse him!” cried the Colonel, with sudden energy; “he is the cause of my ruin.”

“You are the cause of your own ruin, Colonel Dimdale,” replied Cecil, sternly; “your conscience—if you have one—must tell you so; you have brought hundreds to

beggary, and the ruin brought upon you by your confederate is but a righteous judgment. The Whirl-basset lead mine, in which my father was induced to speculate through the false representations of Bleer, was a myth, and you knew it."

"I was deceived myself—I was deceived myself," he muttered faintly.

"You might have been deceived in the first instance, though I doubt it; but you knew well enough that the mine was exhausted and utterly worthless, when by your direction, your creature Stephen Bleer, advanced my father large sums of money to invest in this bankrupt concern. Too well had you laid your plans—your own name was kept out of sight—a high rate of interest for the money invested was punctually paid, till, led on by this short cut to wealth (the ruin of so many) my father embarked the whole of his property

in the scheme. When the Whirl-basset Lead Mine Company was declared insolvent, you foreclosed your mortgages on my father's land, sold everything, and John and Cecil Meadows were beggars."

Cecil covered her face with her hands and her bosom heaved convulsively, but again her strength of will prevailed, the tumult within was hushed, and she proceeded—

"We should all have been in the Union but for the kindness of Lady Jane. She gave us a cottage rent free in the park at Rockmoor Castle, and allowed my father a most liberal annuity. It was not for long; John Meadows died broken-hearted three years after you had effected his ruin; but the allowance was continued to my mother, who lived, as she herself said, for the sake of her children; had she been childless, I believe she would have lain down and died by the side of her husband. She is now

gone, and on her death-bed she forgave you all, for she had the spirit of an angel; she did more, she made both Grace and me promise, that should you ever be in danger or in difficulties, we would, to the utmost of our power, assist you. These were her words: 'Never forget the debt of gratitude you owe to the Dimdale family; they have befriended me and mine for long, long years. The late Sir Charles Dimdale saved my father's life at the risk of his own, and should any of the family, even Jacob himself, who has done me so much wrong, need assistance, I charge you both to render it.' And therefore, Colonel Dimdale, I am here now to assist my husband in befriending you—yes! even though you have succeeded, for a time, in implicating his name in your fraud and villany, I will keep my promise. It was a poor, spiteful trick, to try to drag Rupert down into the

mire with yourself, but you have done so much worse that I heed it not; it is your last dying effort to injure us, and it is worthy of you, Colonel Dimdale."

She ceased. Colonel Dimdale buried his face in his hands, but said nothing.

"I am not surprised," continued Cecil, "that my face and voice strike you dumb, make your black heart sink, and your craven body tremble with dastard fear. I am, I know, the living image of my dead mother;—in form, in feature, in the tone of my voice I am her counterpart; but not in the temper of my mind; and when I see you before me, and remember the ruin you wrought to those I loved best, I am more inclined to deliver you up to justice than to save you from it."

"You—you said you would help me—that you would not be—betray me," gasped the miserable man.

"Look up, Colonel Dimdale; take your hands from before your face, and look at me," was the stern reply.

He did so.

"You *may* escape the vengeance of man, but do not hope to elude the justice of heaven! Either in this world or in the next you will surely reap your reward; in both—perchance in both—for the hearts of your victims are bitter against you, and a secret vengeance may be creeping silently towards you at this very moment."

So saying, she abruptly left the cave, followed by Rupert.

"Oh, Rupert," she said, when they had gained the ledge of rock outside, "my last words sound like an inspiration to me; I have an inward conviction that vengeance will overtake that man yet."

"He deserves it, Cecil, but *we* must not



bring it upon him ; our honour is pledged to——”

“Deserves! ah, do not talk of that, or I shall never be able to fulfil my promise.”

She leaned her head against the rock—she pressed her burning brow upon the cold snow—tears rained down her white cheeks. “Oh, mother, mother!” she cried, “my suffering, angel mother! it is hard to obey you. Rupert,” she said, fiercely, “there are times when I feel tempted to—to—destroy instead of save him.” The dangerous light, before mentioned by Rupert, glittered in her eye, and she clenched her hand till the sharp knuckle seemed ready to burst through the thin skin.

Rupert passed his arm round her waist, drew her towards him and kissed her hot forehead. “No wonder, dearest—no wonder that the thought of the parents’

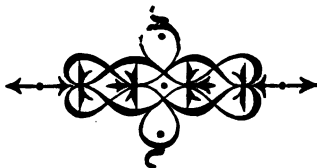
wrongs should well nigh drive the daughter mad; but as my own Cecil is the exact image of her beautiful mother in form and feature, so will she strive to resemble her in the loveliness of her mind."

"I will—I will," sobbed the poor girl, as the cruel gleam left her eyes and her fingers relaxed their grasp; "forgive me, Rupert, I would not really harm him. Wicked thoughts will come; but I will fight against them—I will strive. Ah, mother! mother! you taught me how!"

She sank upon her knees, and with clasped hands and upturned face, on which the first pale light of morning gently rested, she prayed for strength to resist the evil passions of an evil nature, for strength to trample out the pride of a proud heart—for a humble spirit—a lowly mind—a forgiving soul.

Art thou hugging thyself upon thy superior sanctity? Hast thou no pride to trample out? No humility to pray for? Dost thou thank God that thou art not as other men are? Fall down on thy knees if such be thy thoughts, for, believe me, thou, too, hast need of forgiveness; thou in thy purple and fine linen—thou in thy pharisaical pride and self-sufficiency, for thou, too, art on the brink of a precipice—nay! thou art even now toppling over, but in thy blind presumption thou dost not see it, or seeing it, thou trustest to thine own strength to bear thee up. Dost thou think, in the miserable pride of thine heart, to stifle thy conscience with vain boastings? Dost thou regard with self-complacency and derisive pity the youthful sinner acknowledging her sin and supplicating for mercy and forgiveness? *Thou* art the proper object of pity—thou in thy self-

righteousness and false security — *not*  
that pale - faced girl with streaming  
eyes and aching heart kneeling upon the  
snow.





## CHAPTER VI.

### HOW TO GET HIM OUT.



ECIL arose from her knees calm and composed. It was seldom that anything affected her visibly. Natures such as hers are, however, at times fearfully shaken, and as it takes a tempest to move them, so much the more violently do they rock when moved. It must be remembered, too, that Cecil's position was a most peculiar one. To serve and to save the man who had so wronged her parents, jarred against nature itself, for man's is an evil nature. It is easy to repeat moral truths, but it is not easy to practise them ; it is easy to say " Love your enemies," but not

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easy to fulfil the command. Of the dangers and difficulties that beset her path in her endeavours to serve Colonel Dimdale, she was regardless: hers was not a nature to shrink from either dangers or difficulties in a good cause, and, to her thinking, this was a good cause, since it was at the dying request, nay, command of her mother, that she had undertaken it; and yet the very sight of that man stirred up the angry passions of her heart continually, she looked on him with horror and loathing; there was a constant battle raging in her mind between hatred for him and love for her mother. The latter was, as we have seen, the stronger feeling—it nerved her for the duty she had to perform, it enabled her to fulfil her sacred promise; but the very intensity of her affection for her mother, on the other hand, greatly and naturally increased her abhorrence of that mother's

relentless persecutor. Well might she say, "Oh, mother, it is hard to obey you!" Cecil was young, and possessed the head-strong passions natural to youth, and although generous and kind-hearted, she could not realize the beauty of Christian forgiveness, she could not say from her heart, "Do good to them that hate you," she could go no further in her charity than "Do no harm to those that hate you." She would not willingly have injured Colonel Dimdale, neither would she of her own free will have moved a finger to serve him.

There was therefore a constant and severe strain upon every good and virtuous principle, to keep under and subdue the pride of her heart, which would never let her rest night or day, which never lets you or me rest night or day, but is ever and always, under the guise of self-respect, whittling away at our good resolutions till

they become threadbare and full of holes: disguised, perchance, by an external covering of conceit and self-approbation;—the putty and paint with which we patch up our moral bulwarks;—but utterly worthless as a defence against the insidious attacks of our persevering and powerful enemy.

Calm and composed, Cecil arose from her knees. “I will return to the cottage, Rupert, now, and prepare to receive the Cuffs, who will be sure to pay it a visit this morning,” she said, in her usual quiet tone.

Her husband gazed into her eyes eagerly and fondly. “Yes, go, dearest, I can trust you, I see; do not let either the rudeness or the vulgarity of those fellows move you beyond the bounds of prudence, or—or——”

“Of common sense,” interrupted Cecil, with a smile. “You need not be afraid; I will not lose my temper again, to-day at all events—I am strengthened.”



So saying, she began cautiously to ascend the perilous path, but it was light enough for her to see plainly, and although the heavy fall of snow during the night had increased the difficulties of the way, Cecil, aided by her spiked staff, proceeded steadily and safely to the top of the cliff.

How the "Handcuffs" paid her a second visit—how they produced their search-warrant—how they ransacked the house from bottom to top—how they found nothing for their pains—and how they departed empty-handed as they came—it is not necessary to relate; we will therefore return with Rupert to the interior of the cave.

The moment he entered, Colonel Dimdale began eagerly to cross-question him as to the vengeance with which Cecil had threatened him. What could it be? Whence could it come? Rupert could

give him no clue; Colonel Dimdale must trust to time, he said, to unravel the future, and in the meanwhile, he must rest satisfied with the assurance that they were there to befriend, and not to betray him; indeed he must feel sure of that, for had they wished to give him up, they need but have left him in the cottage, when, long ere this, he would have fallen into the hands of the Cuffs.

An unknown evil is proverbially the most difficult to bear; I could of course occupy many sheets of paper with ready-cut-and-dried reasons to prove the truth of this assertion; I could dilate upon the misery of suspense, upon the liability of the human mind, as well as body, to tremble in the dark;—and many more truisms of the like description I could enunciate; but I will forbear, because I believe them to be as well known as they are respectable, which is not

always the case either with people or proverbs.

Colonel Dimdale brooded with gloomy brow and shaking limbs over this unknown evil, this vengeance that was creeping silently towards him.

Look at him as he leans against the side of the cave, squatting amongst the straw and rushes; look at his haggard features, his matted hair, his bloodshot eyes, his soiled, disordered garments. A week ago, less than a week ago, that wretched object was a fine London gentleman, without a speck either upon his clothes or his character. In place of a damp cave half-way up the face of a precipitous cliff, he inhabited one of the best houses in — Square; he was the associate of noblemen and noble—gentlemen, which, allow me to observe, *passim*, are not always synonymous terms. He dined off costly plate, he quaffed the

richest wines, he was surrounded by all of luxury and ease that a refined taste and a lavish expenditure could supply ; gems of art adorned his walls, gems of art crowded his tables ; thick Turkey carpets, rich velvet hangings, the most elastic of spring cushions, the most somniferous of arm-chairs—all were his.

\* \* \* \* \*

Colonel Dimdale is standing on the steps of his Club ; look at him ! there is not a better got-up man in London ; from his well-brushed, glossy hat and faultless tie, to his pale lavender “kids” and highly polished boots, he is a perfect specimen of a man about town.

Colonel Dimdale is chatting with two friends, the one a Cabinet minister, the other an Earl and Lord Lieutenant of a county. He looks complacently at the

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well-appointed brougham, with its pair of thorough-bred horses, awaiting his orders; the horses stamp with well-bred impatience and they toss and shake their proud heads, flecking their dark sides with white foam. At length, with a smile on his lips and a friendly good-bye, the millionaire banker descends the steps, enters his brougham, and is driven rapidly away.

"Where on earth is Dimdale off to in such a hurry?" says the Cabinet minister.

The noble Lord Lieutenant of ——shire could not tell him, but we can.

Rogues must have strong nerves or they could not look honest men in the face as they do,—honest men whom they have ruined or are ruining,—pleasant companions, valued friends. Still less could a man draw on his kid gloves, as he stands on the steps of his Club for the last time, with an unshaking hand, smile gaily, converse freely,

and depart slowly and unconcernedly, with the full knowledge that his many acts of fraud and embezzlement have at length been discovered and that the officers of justice were probably even then on his track;—unless he had very strong nerves indeed.

And yet, from the glimpse you have had of Colonel Dimdale in the cave, you might pronounce him a poor cowardly creature, utterly incapable of so much strength of will, hardihood, and power of endurance; but in so doing you would betray but a limited knowledge of frail human nature.

Boasting, bragging, bravadoing one moment, cringing, quaking, despairing the next. As long as a quiver of the lips or a falter of the tongue might have betrayed him, Colonel<sup>•</sup>Dimdale's lips quivered not, his tongue faltered not; as long as an unembarrassed air, a cheerful manner, a gay

smile were necessary for his safety, so long were they adopted and maintained. The strain on the nervous system had been excessive, and now that the necessity for such tension was removed, the reaction was in a corresponding degree excessive also, and the iron-nerved man was transformed into the trembling coward.

As the dropping of water will wear away the hardest rock, so will the still small voice of conscience penetrate the most obdurate heart. The vision of Cecil Meadows,—the Cecil Meadows, of thirty years ago—the Cecil Meadows he had wronged so deeply,—had unmanned him; and now, the voice of conscience, no longer speaking in whispers, swept over his soul with resistless violence; the fictitious barriers against her entrance, which time, habit, and hard-hearted selfishness had erected, were scattered to the winds, and his slan-

derous falsehoods, his relentless and unjustifiable revenge, stood before him in all their naked deformity.

No wonder he cowered beneath the eyes and the voice of Cecil's daughter, as she laid bare the infamous past, as she hinted at the avenging future.

Rupert gazed on the shrinking, trembling man, and a touch of scorn was perceptible in the tone of his voice, as he asked him if he were cold; and although he threw his own heavy pilot-coat over him, he performed this act of care and kindness with ill-disguised disgust.

It may be as well to explain how the family of Rupert Vicars, as well as that of Cecil, had incurred a debt of gratitude to the Dimdale family.

Rupert's grandfather, a yeoman of Kent, and formerly a wealthy man, had by a series of misfortunes been reduced to great poverty,



and at his death, his son George, in spite of the good education he had received, enlisted as a private in the —th Hussars.

Colonel Dimdale's father (Sir Charles Dimdale), who was at that time in the same regiment, becoming acquainted with George Vicars's history, took him by the hand, and fully appreciating the worth of his character, purchased his discharge when he himself left the regiment, and appointed him agent to his Irish estates; thus was the Kentish yeoman's son restored to his pristine position in society.

This was the more agreeable to George Vicars, as he was married, and was enabled by this means to give his son Rupert, then a great overgrown lad of fifteen, an education equivalent to his own.

At Sir Charles Dimdale's death, his eldest son (Charles) succeeded to the title and estates, whilst his younger son (Jacob)

wasted time, health, and money in a crack cavalry regiment.

Time rolled on, and the elder brother married (of which marriage more anon), became the father of two children, and died. In a few more years, George Vicars also died, and Sir Charles Dimdale's widow, the Lady Jane, appointed Rupert to his father's post.

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It was noon ere Cecil returned from the cottage, bringing with her the news of the unwelcome visit of the "handcuffs" and their proceedings.

What was to be done? Colonel Dimdale had, with great difficulty and some danger, been removed to the cave, it having been considered unsafe for him to remain at the cottage, on account of reports that had reached the ears of Rupert and Cecil; that these reports were well founded, was proved

by the visit of the "handcuffs," and by the notice in the "Hue and Cry."

The officers of justice, either accidentally or from information, were on his track. It was clear that he could not, without the almost certainty of capture, return to the cottage, still less could he remain in the cave for any length of time without perishing from cold and damp. Colonel Dimdale's health was visibly broken; the anxiety, distress of mind, and terror of imagination that he had lately undergone, had already debilitated a body never robust, and rendered still more delicate by a life of luxury and dissipation.

His companions lighted a fire, at the risk of being betrayed by the smoke; they made him strong coffee, and cooked in a rude, primitive fashion a slice of meat, which, with a few hard biscuits, Cecil had brought with her; and Colonel Dimdale, the fas-

tidious Colonel who quarrelled with the *cuisine* of his Clubs, and declared that he never could get anything fit to eat, either at the "Travellers'," "White's," or "Boodle's," drank boiling coffee out of a tin mug, and devoured half-raw beefsteaks and hard sailors' biscuits, with an eagerness and relish which would have most amazingly astounded his friends the Cabinet minister and the Lord Lieutenant of —shire, could they have witnessed his gastronomic performances.

"Well, sir, how do you feel now?" said Rupert, when the Colonel, having satisfied his hunger, leaned back again upon his heap of rushes.

"Better, a good deal; but when are we to leave this horrid hole? another night in it will kill me."

"We will get you away as soon as we can, but you heard what Cecil said

about the Cuffs and the search warrant?"

"Yes—yes," cried the terrified man.

"Well," continued Rupert, "we can't go back to the cottage—that's clear; we must get you out of the country as soon as possible, but in the mean time I am afraid you must stay where you are. We will bring another rug or two (if we can find them), and make you as comfortable as circumstances will permit."

The Colonel said no more, but he groaned in spirit, and gnashed his teeth with rage and despair. The last blow that had fallen on him was the worst of all; it had crushed him to the earth; he could brazen out his dishonour, his loss of character, his social disgrace, but he could not meet poverty—the thought of his utter destitution overwhelmed him. He had, as Rupert rightly divined, secured deeds and papers,

which, although of no use to him, were invaluable to others, and for the restitution of which, he well knew their legitimate owners would pay largely. Once in a foreign land, he could easily have negotiated these papers, and with their proceeds have lived in luxury for the remainder of his days; but they had been torn from him, and he was a beggar!

"Rupert," said Cecil after a pause, "I have a great mind to consult Aunt Dorothy; they could help us at Hollowhill, if they would."

"Mrs. Danger can't bear the Colonel," whispered Rupert.

"I know that, but she is fond of me, and loved my mother dearly; I am sure she would help us."

"Well, do as you like, Cecil; we have failed as yet in getting a boat, perhaps Mr. Danger could do better; we *must* get him

away somehow from this cave or he will die, as sure as my name's Rupert Vickers."

Cecil pondered a moment. "I am more afraid of Uncle Danger than of Aunt Dorothy; but, Rupert, we must trust somebody—we shall never get him away of ourselves."

They had gone outside the cave to be beyond earshot of the Colonel, who, ever suspicious, had watched their whisperings with an uneasy, anxious glance.

"The sun is getting low," said Cecil. "I must go at once and get those rugs; I shall not be long away." So saying she sprang lightly up the narrow path.

Rupert watched her with eyes of love and admiration. "Am I right in exposing her to so much discomfort, not to say danger?" he thought; "gratitude is a very proper feeling, but I have heard or read some-

where, that a virtue, if pushed too far, becomes a vice. Suppose anything should happen to that dear girl: her foot might slip, or her head turn dizzy, or one of those Cuffs might be insolent—ha!” A dark frown gathered on Rupert’s brow, and he stamped his foot angrily. Another moment and he too was ascending the cliff; he gained the top, and raising his head slowly above the jutting rock, looked cautiously around. Cecil was already halfway to the cottage, he saw her enter it, but he still remained at his post. Twenty times he was on the point of following her, but the thought of the risk he should run, deterred him, for his figure was remarkable and well known in that part of the country, and besides, had he not been accurately described in the “Hue and Cry?”

But he would watch and see that no one came to the cottage whilst Cecil was there;



and if he had cause to suspect that all was not right, he would go to her, come what might of it; if he were bound in gratitude to assist Colonel Dimdale, he was much more bound by affection to protect his wife.

Cecil was busily employed in collecting wraps and food for Rupert and the Colonel, when a gentle tap at the door sent her heart into her mouth. She started and listened eagerly. Could she be mistaken? No, there it was again—a decided knock for admittance.

“Who knocks?” she asked, in as gruff a voice as she could command.

“Mr. Danger of Hollowhill; if you’ll let me sit down a bit, I’ll thank you kindly.”

Cecil opened the door, and in walked her uncle. He stared hard at her.

“Take a chair; you are welcome to rest yourself, if that’s what you want.”

Mr. Danger sat down mechanically, but never took his eyes off Cecil's face.

She returned his gaze; at first steadily, but presently a slight colour flushed her face, a slight smile dimpled her cheek.

Mr. Danger brought his blackthorn down hard on the floor. "I don't know as I should have found you out, Cecil, unless my missis had put me up to't, for I'm blessed if ever I seen a better disguise than yourn! Why, what a smart young man you are! no one would ever take you for a woman, not in that rig!—ha! ha! ha!" and the farmer laughed heartily, much to Cecil's discomfiture, her face getting rosier every minute.

"Uncle Danger," she said at length, "you are the very person I wished to see; you must help us."

"Ay, so your aunt says—but how, my

girl? how am I to help you? that's what I want to know?"

"Good gracious!" cried Cecil, "what's that?"

Mr. Danger looked round quickly and saw a human face flattened against the window; it vanished, however, as soon as seen, the door was opened, and Rupert stood on the threshold.

"Oh, Rupert! how you frightened me!" said Cecil.

"I am very sorry, but the fact is, I wanted to know who you had got with you," replied her husband, shaking Mr. Danger heartily by the hand. He then told them that fearing the Cuffs might molest Cecil, he had taken up his position at the top of the cliff, whence he had seen Mr. Danger approach the cottage, and had mistaken him for Robert Cuff. "You are about the same height and build, you

know," he added, "and I was not near enough to see your face."

"Well, I suppose you wasn't," growled the farmer, not feeling at all flattered at having been mistaken for "Ugly Bob."

"And so, Rupert, you and Cecil are really an' truly engaged in this mad business o' gettin' the Colonel out o' the country?"

"Why, yes, we are, and what's more, we want you to help us."

"Ay, that's what Cecil says—and what Dame Dorothy says—but how am I to do't? I'd just like you to tell me that!"

"Well, we'll talk it over, Mr. Danger; we shall be able to hit upon some plan or other, I dare say. I have been thinking of it whilst I lay with my chin on the rock out there, and I'll tell you what I've thought of."



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE ROUGHS OF SHINGLETON.



LOSE upon the sea-shore is situated the village of Shingleton, a populous, straggling sort of place, the inhabitants of which had formerly enjoyed the equivocal reputation of being the most determined and daring smugglers upon the coast; but smuggling having of late years fallen to a discount, the men of Shingleton had betaken themselves to the less profitable, but more honest occupation of fishing.

Shingleton was, at the time of which I am writing, essentially a fishing hamlet;

nevertheless, smuggling was not extinct—it did not indeed flourish, but it existed.

Robert and Thomas Cuff had both (owing doubtless to the bad example of others, rather than to any inherent evil in their own nature) been smugglers; but this was several years ago; they had been fined and forgiven, and the neighbours had apparently adopted Mr. Danger's good-natured theory that "bygones should be bygones."

Shingleton was distant scarcely a mile from the Cliff Cottage; we will walk down its one straggling street, whilst Rupert is explaining the nature of his recent cogitations to his eager listeners.

As we proceed, we observe a signboard on the opposite side of the way; we stop and examine it. Two exceedingly red-faced men, bursting with laughter, are sitting at a table, each with a pewter pot.

before him, of far superior dimensions to himself. Our first feeling is that of surprise at the tenacity with which the pewter pots cling to a table slanting apparently at an angle of about forty-five degrees from the horizontal; our next of admiration at the magnificent white cauliflowers that crown the pots; we also perceive several diminutive cauliflowers ascending from the bowls of two clay pipes, that decorate the hands of the roseate men.

Beneath this representation of animal and vegetable life, appear these words—

THE JOLLY MARINERS,

By Robert Cuff.

A small blue board over the door added yet this information—

“Robert Cuff, Licensed to Sell Spirituous Liquors, Tea, Coffee, Tobacco, and Snuff.”

Let us walk in. It is too enticing an invi-

tation (for surely that sign is an invitation) lightly to refuse.

A stifling smell of tobacco, and a stinging odour of spirits from the half-open door on the left of the entrance, greet us as we advance; but we are not to be deterred by trifles, so we enter.

A motley group of amphibious animals are congregated together; Jerseys, plain, spotted, and striped; canvas trowsers, patched with tar, and seamed with grease; wide-awakes, and nor'-westers of various shapes, all are here.

These are some of the "roughs" of Shingleton; rough and ready they are, hardy fishermen for the most part, brawny of limb and stout of heart, who pursue their dangerous and ill-requited calling, with steady and honest perseverance. Some there be doubtless amongst these weather-beaten men whose pursuits could not bear



triumphantly too close an inspection, whose labours upon the sea are not confined to catching fish; but in this peculiarity they differ not materially from their betters—socially considered—from those who paying respect to the revenue laws, and showing a clear invoice for all their goods; water their whisky, sand their sugar, and go to prayers.

The room is long and narrow, and a long and narrow deal table, highly ornamented with divers carvings of ships and anchors, and deeply stained with superfluous potations, occupies the space from door to fireplace, where huge blocks of seacoal glow and glimmer.

Upon forms, ranged on either side the table, the men sit drinking, smoking, and staring. You can see at a glance that the occupants of that room are neither of Irish nor French extraction—it is clear

that they have not "the gift of the gab." Sooth to say, the Shingleton fishermen are by no means a loquacious race; *facta non verba* is their motto, and not a bad one either; we can honestly recommend it to the serious consideration of many of our legislators, orators, and diplomatists.

We pass through this room and find ourselves in the inner parlour, the sanctum of the proprietor of the hostel, whom behold, by the margin of cold gin-and-water, discussing matters of apparently unusual interest with his brother Thomas.

Robert Cuff (*loquitur*): "I don't agree with that—no ways. I thinks it better to stay where we bees to-night; they'll be throwed off their guard, ten to one, and we'll be up there in the mornin' afore it's light an' nab some on 'em—you see if we don't."

"I wonder who that young feller is, with

his white face and his imperdence?" said Tom.

"Who cares? Nobody as we wants—a blind, that's what he is; but he wont blind Bob Cuff."

"If he don't blind you, he'll likely beat you," grinned his brother.

"Come, you drop that, will you? and talk sense if you can," growled Bob. "I'd rayther than a ten-poun' note lay a holt o' that stuck-up chap, Rupert Vicars, even supposin' we misses the Colonel—which we wont do nether, if I can help it."

"I can't abide that Vicars no more than you; to see him strut through the streets as stiff and stately as though he'd swallied a poker, allus makes me sick—he looks upon us as dirt jest."

"I'll dirt him; I'll dust his jacket for him yet. Never you fear, Tom, but I'll have my gentleman by the 'eels in the county jail

afore twenty-four hours is come an' gone; that he and the Colonel is lurkin' som'eres 'ereabouts, I'm mortally sartin." Robert Cuff ratified this assertion by a tremendous blow on the table with his clenched hand: he looked fiercely at his brother, as much as to say, "Contradict that if you dare!" but Tom merely snatched up his glass in hot haste, observing—

"What's the use o' spillin' the liquor? that won't'elp ketch the Colonel—an''e's the mark arter all said an' done. Five 'underd poun's is better nor vengince and one 'underd, any day—an' so you bees welcome to Rupert Vicars, if purviso I nabs the Colonel."

"We'll have 'em both, my boy; onny you do as I says, and we'll nab 'em both; for if we finds Vicars assistin' of the Colonel to 'scape, or even a concealing of 'im, we can nab 'im without a warrant—leastwise I means to't, right or wrong. My eyes, Tom!

that would be jolly, eh? Six 'underd in our pockets, an' Rupert Vicars in the county jail!" He rubbed his hands joyfully, and drained his tumbler in the exuberance of his delight at the pleasing prospect, which his lively imagination, aided by a sordid and revengeful nature, had depicted.

The two worthies hereupon put their heads together, and chalked out a plan for the capture of the delinquent Dimdale, and his aider and abettor Vicars.

Robert Cuff again expressed his conviction that they were hiding in the neighbourhood of Shingleton (it was strange that the smugglers' cave, so well known to him, never occurred to his mind as a likely place of concealment), he also declared his belief that the pale-faced lad at the Cliff Cottage was in the business, or "on the lay," as he technically termed it—he had given a very

lame account of himself and his reasons for being there; he was always expecting his father, and his father never made his appearance; he, Robert Cuff, should watch him pretty closely, and the cottage too—ay, and the sea-shore; he'd take precious good care that no boat left that part of the coast without either himself or one of his friends overhauling it.

Now Bob Cuff had an extensive acquaintance amongst constables, revenue men, and the like; his boast was therefore not an empty one. It would indeed have been difficult for a boat, with Colonel Dimdale on board, to leave that coast unperceived or unexamined, for others as well as Bob Cuff would be sure to have an eye to the five hundred pounds.

Whilst the Cuffs were arranging and maturing their plans, a dark form passed and repassed the windows of the room

several times; many others had indeed done the like, hurrying home along the cold street, but he alone paused before the partially closed shutters, and stooping forward peered into the little parlour. This process was repeated more than once. At length the man seemed satisfied. "They are both there, I am pretty sure," he muttered, and without more ado he passed on to the front of the house, entered the passage, and, standing by the door of the long room before mentioned, looked fixedly and inquiringly at its occupants, as though searching for some one.

Presently he sauntered slowly in, took a seat by the table and called in a hoarse voice for a pipe and a pot of beer.

He was altogether a remarkable looking man; no wonder the company at the Jolly Mariners stared at him as he sat there stuffing the tobacco into the bowl of

his pipe, and whistling the fag end of "Black-Eyed Susan," as coolly as though no one was in the room but himself.

The man was apparently unknown to any there present, which fact was in itself matter of astonishment to all: so seldom did a stranger make his appearance in that quiet, out-of-the-way fishing hamlet, and especially a man of his extraordinary size and swarthy countenance.

He was considerably over six feet in height, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, and his face dark as a thorough-bred gipsy's; corkscrew curls, black as night, hung down either cheek, whilst a thick beard and overhanging moustache of the same ebon hue, covered his chin and upper lip; his eyes were keen and piercing. He wore a dark-blue pilot-coat, glazed hat with a broad, slouching leaf, which cast a shade over his features, and a pair of rough



Flushing trousers. In short, he was a most formidable-looking personage—a singular combination of gipsy and bandit, with a touch of the sailor.

When he had filled his pipe to his satisfaction, he held the bowl to the flame of a neighbouring tallow candle, and speedily drew the tobacco into a blaze; then leaning back against the wall, he took a look at the company with a quiet coolness which characterized his whole proceedings.

“Well, mate! what port do you hail from? You seems to take things easy where-soever you comes from—that you *does*,” said an old salt, whose wonder at the appearance of the new comer was rapidly changing into anger at his nonchalance.

The stranger laughed good-humouredly, exhibiting as he did so, a set of exceedingly white, even teeth, which it might have been remarked by an attentive observer, remained

close set, even when speaking: a peculiarity that gave to his voice an unnatural, almost sepulchral tone, very much at variance with his jovial laugh and flashing eyes.

“Where do I come from, friend? from the moon, to be sure. Where do you?”

“Ay, ay! I thought you was a bit of a moon-calf; you’re too black i’ the feace for a Christian, you bees,” rejoined old Fluke.

This sally produced many a “haw-haw-haw” from the benches, which in no wise disconcerted the stranger, who, on the contrary, seemed to enjoy the joke, though at his own expense.

Good nature is contagious; no set of men appreciate the give-and-take system more heartily than the class to which our friends the roughs of Shingleton belonged. A short answer, or a surly manner, would have roused their indignation at once, and

the stranger would have been voted an intruder; but his off-hand behaviour was just the thing to suit them, and when he ordered a stoup of brandy to be distributed amongst them, "to pay his footing," as he expressed it, his popularity was established.

Old Fluke, however, although he did not refuse the brandy (he hadn't the heart to do that), still eyed the donor with distrust. Old Fluke was, from the nature of his occupations, suspicious, in short—truth is best—he had been born and bred a smuggler, and although the illicit trade was not what it used to be in his younger days, he was not quite weaned from it; he dabbled in contraband even yet, and as he would himself have said, he "was not a-goin' to be ketched nappin' if he knowed it."

The liberality of the stranger was then, to old Fluke's suspicious mind, a cause of

uneasiness. "What makes this chap give us a lot o' brandy? a passel of fellers he never sin afore? tain't for nothin', *I* knows—tain't nateral as it should be," whispered the old man to his son, who sat beside him.

"Never you mind what for he gives it; you drink it, that's all you've got to do," was the philosophic reply.

The old man smiled contemptuously, as he tossed off a glass of hot stuff. "Drink it! in coorse I'll drink it, Bill, but I ain't a-goin' to let it get in my eye; that chap ain't a-sailin' under true colours; if he bees, I'm ——" (You will be pleased to imagine the termination of Mr. Fluke's declaration in favour of the stranger being an impostor.) "And," continued that worthy, "you keep your eyes open too, Bill; that chap smells as like a shark as pitch to tar."

Bill nodded a silent acquiescence, and his quick eyes twinkled with intelligence; presently he removed the impediment to his speech from his mouth, and sending forth a rich addition to the already smoke-beclouded room, he pointed his clay at the stranger, and whispered to his father, "My hair's black and my skin's dark, but they ain't like hisen."

This observation, accompanied by sundry hard winks, apparently satisfied old Fluke, for he said not another word, but leaning back against the wall, he puffed away in silent contentment.

In the meantime the stranger had been ingratiating himself by his jokes and good humour, with the other members of the long table, amongst whom neither the blackness of his hair nor the swarthiness of his complexion seemed to have created any unpleasant sensations.

How was it that the Flukes were more sharp-sighted than their companions? Because their smuggling propensities made them so; they were always on the look-out for a shark (*alias* a revenue officer) in disguise, and were moreover tolerably well up in disguises, and could distinguish a dye from nature's handiwork with considerable certainty.

The inner door of the sanctum opened, and the "Handcuffs" entered the room. They were passing through, with a nod to one and a word to another, when Bob's eyes lighted on the stranger. He pulled up short and looked at him hard; his gaze was steadily returned.

"Well, mate, you'll know me when you see me again, I expect?" said he of the corkscrew curls, taking the pipe out of his mouth, and speaking, as usual, through his set teeth.

"A cat may look at a king," said Bob, insolently; for he was more than half drunk.

"To be sure she may, or a cur either. Are you the landlord of this public?"

"Why, yes, I bees, for want of a better."

"Have you anything more drinkable than this stuff, in the house?" pointing contemptuously to the half-emptied stoup of brandy.

"What's the matter wi' the brandy?" growled Bob; "don't it suit your complexshin?"

Old Fluke fixed his eyes on the stranger to see how he took that hit.

"It suits my complexion better than my taste," replied the man, unconcernedly; "though for that matter, the brandy is not amiss for those that like it; for my part I prefer sherry to brandy any day."

"Well, an' if you doos, I can give you

as good a bottle o' sherry as there is in Shingleton," said Bob, in a more civil tone than he had yet adopted; it wasn't every day that a bottle of sherry was asked for at the Jolly Mariners.

"All right—take a bottle of your best in there," pointing to the inner parlour; "I want a word with you alone."

Bob hesitated; he didn't like the looks of the tall swarthy man, he had fierce eyes and big bones, and the muscles on his clenched hand, as it rested on the table, stood out like coils of rope.

Ugly Bob was continually doing something for which he deserved to have his head broken, consequently he did not much fancy being closeted *tête-à-tête* with a stranger big enough to eat him; but then, on the other hand, he was unwilling to disoblige a man who ordered a bottle of his best sherry; he thought of a compromise.



"A word wi' me, eh! Well, I spose you ain't no objecshin to my brother Tom bein' o' the party? We runs in couples mostly, Tom an' me doos."

"No objection whatever, landlord; indeed, what I have to say is as much for his ear as your own."

"Come on then," said Bob; "you show the gen'leman into the parlour, Tom, while I goo and git the liquor."

"That warn't a bad idee," he chuckled to himself as he dived into the cellar; "if that chap means mischief, Tom 'll ketch it instid o' I; ay, ay! let Bob Cuff alone for takin' care o' Number One; whoever buys I for a fool 'll be a smartish time out of 'is money, I expect; I can see as fur through a mud wall as most folks, I can. A word wi' me, eh? won'er what 'tis? Howsomever, there's me an' Tom, an' a room full o' chaps to back us, if so be as he objects to

pay four shillin' for this 'ere sherry." So saying, he stumbled upstairs again with a well cobwebbed bottle under his arm, listened for a moment at the door of the parlour, and hearing no signs of wrath or contention, entered boldly.

He found the stranger and Tom already seated, and apparently in amicable conversation.

I must not omit to mention, that whilst following Tom into the parlour, the stranger had whispered the following words to old Fluke as he passed him—" *The Gauger's Leap—12 to-night.*"

A blank look of astonishment, followed by a bright gleam of intelligence, flitted across the old man's face, for the stranger had spoken in a well-known tone; he had *opened his teeth*.

The parlour door closed upon the two men, before old Fluke recovered his sur-

prise sufficiently to slap his knees and say, "Dang it all!" His feelings being thus relieved he filled a fresh pipe, and helped himself to a glass of the brandy that the stranger had left behind him, passing the remainder to his son, upon whom he fixed his eyes inquiringly.

"All right," muttered Bill, without taking the pipe out of his mouth.

These two men, after the discovery they had made, were "dying with curiosity" (in feminine phrase) to know more; but they exhibited no signs of impatience, they smoked their pipes in silence sufficiently dignified to have sustained the reputation even of Scalpemandeatemup, or the Leaping Panther, that great chief of the Mohicans (not the last) whose chivalrous tomahawk had brained more "braves," and whose red right hand had burnt more villages, with their squaws

and papooses than—I have time to tell you.

The two Flukes, father and son, were, as I have before stated, smugglers—in a small way, certainly, but that was not their fault; they would have preferred a large way could they have accomplished it.

I don't know what your opinion of smuggling may be, in what category you place it, whether amongst the deadly sins, or in company with more venial faults; but I am free to confess that I class it with the latter. I look upon smuggling much in the same light as some noble lords look upon prize-fighting, a pursuit decidedly illegal, and consequently to be put down—when you can catch it,—but also as a most excellent school for the culture of English pluck and daring.

The very name of smuggler has a smack of fascination in it; it is associated with

hardihood and enterprise, with perils by land and perils by sea, bravely met and bravely conquered, with a dark night, a long black lugger, an angry sea, and a lee shore; with strong hands and cool heads landing cargo through the heavy surf.

Skill and bravery are sure to command admiration. Robin Hood was an outlaw, and yet we all have admired him from our childhood, and do so still, unless we happen to be in the company of some superior young gentleman, who professes a holy horror for anything not strictly correct; talks of "violated laws" and "brutalizing pursuits," until all the romance and poetry of the smuggler is swept away by the flood of his eloquence, and lo! in its stead, appears a ferocious savage of gigantic stature, cutting the throat of a lilliputian coast-guardsmen of inoffensive appearance and benevolent countenance.

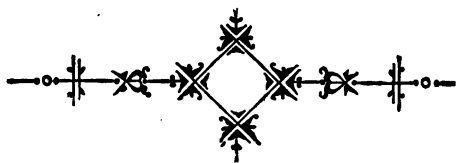
But whatever you or I think about the matter, be sure of this, the smugglers of the time of which I write, were perfectly satisfied that theirs was an honest and a lawful calling. You are surprised at my using the word "lawful;" I do so advisedly. True, old Fluke, who was a fair specimen of his class, knew smuggling was against the law, but he considered said law to be unjust, tyrannical, and in short illegal, and the evading or breaking of it, both right and praiseworthy.

To the rising generation this may appear too absurd to be true, but he who can remember thirty years ago, will, if he have any knowledge of the smuggling communities of that day, bear witness to the truth of this statement.

Do not mistake what I have said for an eulogy on smuggling or a defence of the smuggler. It is neither. I am well aware

of its illegality, and of the necessity for putting it down; but I wish you to understand that old Fluke, although a smuggler, was neither rogue nor rascal. He acted up to the light vouchsafed him, and was straightforward and honest in all his dealings, which is more than can be said for the majority of licensed victuallers, either past or present.

The smugglers of old were remarkable for their fair dealing, but they were in advance of the age in which they flourished—free traders before their time.





## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE HANDCUFFS MOUNT SENTRY.

**M**R. ROBERT CUFF drew the cork of the cobwebbed sherry and placed it before the stranger, who instantly filled the three glasses which Mr. Thomas had officiously placed upon the table.

Thomas Cuff was tolerably sober; he had drunk as much as his brother, but he could stand it better. Besides, he was naturally more brilliant, or to speak correctly, less dull than Bob, who, to do him justice, made up for this deficiency of intelligence by a corresponding superfluity of firmness. The tenacious obstinacy with which Bob



clung to the wrong, was worthy of all admiration to those who worship decision alone, regardless of the cause that calls it forth. But I do not think that Robert Cuff could legitimately lay claim to this quality as an idiosyncrasy of his own; for experience convinces me that, as a rule, the wrong is more stoutly maintained than the right, especially by those who are least acquainted with the subject they discuss.

“Was you ever in these parts afore?” said Tom, as he tossed off his glass of sherry.

“You think you’ve seen me before?” was the evasive reply.

“Well, yes, I does; truth’s best. No offence, I ’opes?”

“None whatever. I have no doubt we have met before to-night, somewhere or other—for I am here, there, and everywhere, though not always in the same rig.”

“Oh! you sails under false colours, does you?” said Bob, his sagacity jumping to the conclusion that the stranger was a smuggler, and his business there to bribe them for their assistance, or at all events neutrality, when “the run” was to be made. Bob brightened up at the prospect of gain. “Come,” he continued, “make a clean breast on’t, mate; we be both on us fren’s to free trade.”

“So am I,” replied the stranger, affecting not to understand him; “but that has nothing to do with my business at Shingleton.”

“Why, I thought——” began Bob, when his brother interrupted him with a most uncomplimentary personal expletive—

“’Old your tongue, can’t you?” he growled; “you’re allus puttin’ your foot in it, you are. And what may your business be here, an’ where do you hail from? ef I may

be so bold as t'ast?" he inquired of the stranger.

"You are both of you constables, are you not?" was the somewhat Irish reply.

"'Appen we bees, 'appen we baint," said Bob, who had the rare merit of blurting out secrets that had been better concealed, and of making a mystery when none was needed.

"Pooh!" said the stranger, "I know you are; and now to answer your questions," turning to Tom. "I hail from London, and my business is with Colonel Dimdale and Rupert Vicars, and I *do* sail under false colours as you very shrewdly guessed, Mr. Robert. Look here." He pulled up the sleeve of his pea-jacket, and laid bare an arm white as a woman's, which appeared still whiter by contrast with the stained hand and wrist.

The two constables stared stupidly at this phenomenon.

"Dang it all!" cried Tom at last, "ef that there brown mark on t'wrist baint jest loike an 'andcuff;" after which professional remark, he stared harder than ever.

"So you bees a Lunnon p'liceman, be you! I dunner as ever I sin one afore," remarked Bob, looking at the stranger with mingled awe and admiration.

"I'm down here about Colonel Dimdale's business, as I told you; you have seen the 'Hue and Cry,' I suppose?"

"Ay, ay!" said Bob, with drunken solemnity, "we knows all about that; five 'underd for the old chap, one 'underd for the young un."

"Exactly so; and from information I have received, I have reason to suppose it likely they may be in this neighbourhood. Now if they are, two such sharp fellows as

you, are sure to have heard of them; there's never a whisper upon this coast but comes to your ears, Mr. Robert, I know." The great London policeman here slapped Bob on the shoulder with patronizing familiarity.

"I should rayther think not," replied Bob, placing his coarse red finger alongside his coarse red nose, and shutting one watery eye, by which pantomimic display he signified that the intelligence and sagacity inherent in Robert Cuff, had placed the hypothesis of an unrecognised "whisper" amongst the absurdities of the age.

"Well, let's hear what your penetration has discovered," said the great man, in a tone which smacked of command.

"Of coorse you'se a right to know all we knows—I'm not sayin' anythin' agin that; but arter all the trouble me an' Tom 'as 'ad watchin' for nights an' nights, friz wi'

snow an' drowned wi' rain, to say nothin' o' bein' half starved, it do seem 'ard, I say, arter all to——"

"Miss your man, you mean, which, without my assistance, you probably would. I see well that it *would* be hard, but working together I have no doubt we shall catch him—catch them both."

"Oh—h!" said Bob, in stupid astonishment, for the words put into his mouth by this offhand gentleman, were by no means the words he had intended should come out of it.

"Oh yes, we'll catch them both; I seldom miss my man. Never fear, Mr. Robert; don't look glum about it; the Colonel is a slippery one, I know, but he wont wriggle out of *my* fingers. If once I get a clue to his whereabouts, it will be a good job for you two chaps."

"For we three chaps, you means,"

growled Bob, whose anger at the Londoner's intrusion was getting the better of his awe.

"No I don't—I mean you two—I shall not get any of the reward. Scotland Yard pays me."

"Oh! what! shan't you cry shares wi' me an' Tom ef we ketches them chaps?"

"Certainly not—not a penny; it will be all your own."

"Dang it all! you *air* a trump, an' no mistake," shouted Tom with maudlin ecstasy, all traces of glumness and hesitation vanishing with the rapidity of magic.

Bob's last lingering suspicions died out at this chivalrous announcement, and both brothers now vied with each other in giving every information in their power to this prince of policemen.

We are already acquainted with the nature of their communication.

"An' that's all we knows," said Tom, who had been chief spokesman. "Tain't much, you'll say, sir, but 'appen you'll make somethin' on it."

"Something! I should think so," rubbing his hands with great glee. "It's a certainty! You two fellows only obey my instructions, and if I don't put six hundred pounds into your pockets, my name is not Grasp—that's all!"

The "Handcuffs" were overpowered with gratitude and delight.

"We'll obey your 'structions, sir, you on'y tell us what they be," cried Tom.

"You'd better, you'll miss your mark if you don't—or worse, be thrown over the cliff perhaps. They tell me that Rupert Vicars is a rummish customer."

"Well, he be a wapper, a'most as big as you, but I baint afeared of him," said pot-valiant Bob.



"It's possible they may try the trick to-night," said the policeman, turning to Tom; "those passes you spoke of should be watched; but I doubt he (pointing over his shoulder) is not fit for duty."

"He will be, sir, in a brace o' shakes; I knows a plaster for 'is sore. Come, Bob, pail time."

Bob rose mechanically, and putting his finger to his nose and winking horribly, followed his brother out of the room.

A curious smile crossed the swarthy countenance of the policeman when the door closed on the constables.

"Upon my word, those two fellows are such blockheads, there's no merit in taking them in," he murmured.

In a few moments the Cuffs returned; Bob's hair was dripping wet, and his face red and glowing.

"All right now, guv'ner, though Tom's

a'most drowned me, keepin' my 'ead under water till I was fit to bust."

"A very little water would bust Bob, though he'll swally no end o' sperrits, and not swell none," remarked Tom, confidentially.

"Come then, we had best be off, for time flies; how far is it to those passes, did you say?"

"How fur? why, not half a mile out o' the village—leastwise no further—be it, Bob?"

"Yes, it's more, but what's the odds; you've a'most drowned me—you 'ave," replied Bob the ungracious, vainly striving to wipe his hair dry with a pocket handkerchief of most unprepossessing appearance.

The night was still, and, save for the light of the stars, dark, when the Cuffs and their strange companion issued into the silent street. It was past ten, and the

primitive Shingletonians had been long a-bed. The tramp of their own feet alone was heard as they passed through the village, continuing their course along the sea shore under the high beetling cliffs.

"Here's the Grey 'Orse," cried Tom Cuff, pointing to a rock of singular shape which by the natives of those parts was considered an admirable representation of the aforesaid animal; "an' 'ere's the path I told you on, as leads right up this 'ere cliff to the Crow's Nest, as we used to call it."

"Ay, ay! the cave, you mean?"

"Izzackly so, and I'd lay tuppence as there's bigger birds nor crows in it this minute!" added Tom, scratching his head and looking wistfully up the steep face of the cliff.

"Well, up with you then and rob the nest; you know the way," said the police-

man cheerfully, as though proposing an easy and agreeable amusement.

“Up wi’ me ! it ’ud be down wi’ me if I was fool enough to goo ; yes, I knows the way, a precious sight too well to try it sich a dark night as this, an’ me not bin it this seven year.”

“Who blabs now ?” growled Bob.

“Pooh ! I have nothing to do with what happened seven years ago,” laughed their companion. “Now, Tom Cuff, you stay here—you have got your barkers?”

Tom nodded, and pointed to the butts of two pistols in his belt.

“All right ! remain here then till I come back, and you’ll let no one either up or down that pass—mind that. Robert Cuff, you come with me and show me the other pass ; step out, we have no time to lose.”

He seemed so thoroughly acquainted with his business, and spoke with such an

air of authority, that to hear was to obey. This grand metropolitan policeman was in the eyes of these village constables a very awful personage indeed.

Mr. Painter, the chief revenue officer in that district, whom the Cuffs had been in the habit of regarding with fear and astonishment, so great was his power, and so unlimited his resources, sunk into comparative insignificance when viewed in conjunction with the great London luminary, who talked of Scotland Yard (awful place!) as though it belonged to him, and was above the allurements of the "Hue and Cry."

Tom Cuff therefore remained steady at his post, though much against his will, for, notwithstanding his "barkers," he had no desire for a *rencontre (solus)* with Rupert Vicars.

A few hundred yards further along the sea

shore Bob came to a halt:—"Here we bees, sir!" he said, pointing to a path broader and more clearly defined than the one at which Tom was posted.

"This leads to the Cliff Cottage, I think you told me, not to the cave?" inquired his companion.

"No, no; there ain't but one to the Crow's Nest, an' Tom's at that 'un."

"Very well, here's your post then; mind you remain at it until you are relieved, and if either Colonel Dimdale or Rupert Vicars comes across you—stop him or shoot him; these are your orders. I shall go by the village road to the cottage, and close up the outlet at the top of the cliff—they can't escape us. Walk about if you feel cold, though the thoughts of the reward should keep you warm. No noise, mind!"

Ugly Bob stared dismally at the receding form of the policeman, whom he verily

believed to be a Lieutenant-General in disguise, for did he not talk of "posting" and "relieving" and "orders" as glibly as Sergeant Duncie himself, who commanded the militia at the neighbouring sea-port town of Dummer? and was he not grander, taller, and far more awful of speech and manner than the said Duncie?

The first sensations that arose in Bob Cuff's mind upon the disappearance of his commanding officer were of a pleasing and proud description. He considered himself in the light of a sentry upon duty, and strutted backwards and forwards with head erect, glancing fiercely from side to side in quest of the lurking foe. Suddenly the nature of his "orders," occurred to him, and his tread lost much of its military character. "Darn't," he muttered; "it's easy to say 'stop em,' 'shoot 'em,' but it ain't so easy to do; that Rupert Vicars be as hard as a

rock. I misdoubt a bullet 'ud turn from his 'ead if it het 'im—an' more nor that, he shoots bootiful wi' a pistol, he does—never misses his aim, he doesn't; an' my 'and, what wi' the cold water that fool Tom throwed over me, an'—an' one thing an' t'other, shakes like a haspin tree." He stretched the member out as he spoke, and certainly from some cause it did tremble considerably.

For an instant he thought of calling Tom to share his watch; no one would hazard the precipitous descent from the crow's nest on so dark a night, but the words of the martial Duncie rung in his ears, and the idea was abandoned as soon as formed. "A sentry as sleeps on his post, or quits it afore he's relieved, will, if found guilty, suffer death, or such other punishment as will, by a general court-martial, be awarded."



These were the memorable and terrible words of Sergeant Dunce, repeated so often in order to impress a due dread and respect for the Service, upon Robert Cuff, that he had never forgotten them. His military strut had now entirely deserted him; he sat down behind a projecting rock, trembling with cold and apprehension. The clink of the shillings in his pockets, where he had thrust his benumbed hands, was no longer suggestive of golden guineas. Bob's cupidity, though great, was secondary to his fear, and at that moment he would have given all the shillings he was fumbling with, and more to boot, to be safe in the inner parlour of the Jolly Mariners.

Reader, you have doubtless long since penetrated Rupert's disguise, for you are neither naturally nor artificially obtuse; on the contrary, you are, I am convinced, a sharp, quick, intelligent person of strictly

sober habits. False hair, walnut juice, and a feigned voice *might* deceive the besotted Cuffs, but you—never.

Rupert walked rapidly towards the village on the other side of which was the Gauger's Leap. As he passed Tom Cuff's post he stopped a moment to bid him "keep a sharp look out," and giving him a flask of brandy to cure his cough (for Tom was coughing for company's sake—anything better than the oppressive silence) he continued his course.

"Everything has gone straight enough as yet," he muttered to himself—"better than I had dared to hope; but there is still much to be done, tougher work too than hoodwinking those owls; the Flukes I can depend upon, but on no one else. Those revenue fellows are as sharp as needles; it won't be easy to get to wind'ard of them; but it must be tried, and to-night too, or

those Cuffs will raise the country on us, and scale the cliff. They would have done so before but that they wanted to keep the reward to themselves; now they say they must make the 'Hue and Cry' public to-morrow, and then good-bye to our chance of escape. What's that leaning against yonder rock? a man certainly—friend or foe, I wonder?" Rupert's doubts were soon dispelled; a low whistle caught his ear, so low, so indistinct, as scarcely to be recognised amidst the hash-sh-sh of the tiny waves as they plashed upon the beach, dragging after them the loose shingle in their receding course.

"Well, Fluke, how goes it?" said Rupert, when he had got under cover of the rock; "you were rather taken aback when I spoke to you to-night, eh?"

"Took aback! I expect I were, Mister Rupert, when you spoke nat'ral like; at

fust I couldn't make you out. I see you was disguised, I sin *that* well enough, an' so did Bill; and we was afeared you might ha' bin 'a shark' you knows, sir, an' so I spoke a bit rough, for which I axes your pardon, Mister Rupert, that I does; but I'd no more noshin as 'twas you—no more nor nothin'—that I had not."

Here, old Fluke drew up short, surprised and even alarmed at his own loquacity, so unusual with him, especially when on duty, as he considered himself at that moment; but ever since Rupert had disclosed himself, the old man had been a victim to pent-up wonder and unsatisfied curiosity, which burst forth, as you have seen, the first favourable opportunity.

Rupert laughed. "I could scarcely keep my countenance when you cross-questioned me so fiercely, Fluke; and Bill looked

ready to jump down my throat—by-the-bye, where is Bill?"

"Here I am, sir," said a voice from the deepest shadow of the overhanging cliff; "dang it, Mister Rupert, I'm ashamed to look you in the face; to think o' me not knowin' o' you—I ought not to ha' bin took in so easy, and if 't hadn't bin for father, I don't know as I should a bin, but he made sure you was a shark, he did."

"That's true, Mister Rupert," said old Fluke; "I misled the lad."

"No wonder those two jolter-headed constables did not recognise me, when old friends failed to do so; but I am surprised at you, Bill, considering all the birds'-nesting and boating we have had together, in days lang syne. But now to business, for time presses."

Rupert then explained his position and his requirements. The Flukes had seen

the "Hue and Cry," the day before at Dummer, but had not said a word about it at Shingleton. It would be known there soon enough, and they were not going "to put a spoke in Mister Rupert's wheel."

"As we come home last night," said Bill, "we was a-talkin' over the matter, an' wishing as we could give you a helpin' han', but we didn't think we'd have the chance. Of all places to run down here, Mister Rupert! Surely that were over-bold, if I may say so, knowed so well as you are here, or used to be?"

"Ay, 'used to be;' but that is some years ago—I have grown since then, stouter at all events. Besides, I thought this was, for the very reason of my being known, the best place to come to; who would think of looking for me here? However, I was mistaken, and now the only thing is to get

away as fast, and as secretly as possible, but I doubt it will be difficult."

"Bother the difficulty!" said Bill, who was sharp as a needle, and confident of his own resources and acuteness, and indeed he well might be, for, young as he was, he had baffled many a lynx-eyed watcher on craig and beach. "Bother the difficulty! we'll match them. Father and me has swung many a keg out o' the Crow's Nest, and why not a Colonel?"

Bill grinned, and rubbed his hard hands together with great glee.





## CHAPTER IX.

### THE CROW'S NEST DESERTED.

**T**HE foregoing chapter will have enlightened you as to the result of the deliberations in the Cliff Cottage. It was a bold resolve of Rupert's, and as boldly executed, for many a one there was in Shingleton, besides the Cuffs, to whom his personal appearance was familiar; but as he himself had observed, when arguing the point with Mr. Danger and Cecil, "the audacity of the venture was in itself an element of success;" and as far as it had gone, so it had proved. It had become positively necessary to remove Colonel Dimdale from the cave that night,



as the probability of his being there was hinted at by the Cuffs on their second visit to Cecil in the cottage, and both brothers had declared to Rupert, when under his assumed character in the inner parlour of the Jolly Mariners, their intention of searching the cave early the next morning. This declaration confirmed Rupert in the plan he had already formed, namely—to post the two constables to watch the only outlets below, whilst he, with the assistance of the Flukes, should haul the Colonel up to the top of the cliff. Cecil and he had found great difficulty in getting Colonel Dimdale into the cave, and he then had been able to help himself; now, however, fatigue, cold, and fright had rendered him utterly helpless.

As soon as the conference at the Cliff Cottage was ended, Mr. Danger started for Hollowhill, to apprise Dame Dorothy of the important part which he, and indeed

she also, was destined to play in the pre-meditated escape; for it had been decided that the Colonel should be taken to Hollowhill, there to lie *perdu*, till the nine days' wonder occasioned by the "Hue and Cry" should have passed over, and with it the extra vigilance of the Cuff tribe in that neighbourhood; after which an attempt should be made to run the gauntlet of the revenue men on the coast, and get the Colonel over the water.

Such was the programme which Mr. Danger detailed to Dame Dorothy, adding that he himself had undertaken to be at the cross roads with the spring-cart at midnight. Rupert would make all necessary arrangements; he had gone to see about it.

"See about it! wherever is he gone to then?" said Dame Dorothy, in her sharpest tones.

“To Shingleton, dame—to Shingleton, to be sure; where else could he get help? he’s gone to see if he can light on the Flukes, old fren’s of his, you know.”

Dame Dorothy held up her hands, signifying thereby her extreme astonishment, while at the same time a broadly marked feeling of contempt was visible in her still fine eyes and comely countenance. “He’ll happen light on other friends besides the Flukes—there’s the Cuffs and the Noddors, let alone the revenue men; and all of them know Rupert Vicars as well as you know the road to your mouth, Richard Danger. Is the man out of his wits—and are you out of yours—as you let him go such a fool’s errand?”

“Well, I was against his going from the first, but howsomever he was bent on it, an’ Cecil dressed him out so as his own mother wouldn’t a-knowed him—with black

hair and a dark skin—such a metamorphosis you’ve never seen in all your life, dame—I didn’t know him myself, not for a minute or two, that I did *not*.”

“Nonsense, Richard Danger! I never saw anybody go on as you do in all my born days; and it would be more becoming of you, an uneddicated man, to use those words only as you can pernounce proper, an’ not be exposing yourself before your daughter and your men, let alone Kattern Doyle; but you are so proud of your nevvie, as you call Rupert Vicars, though he ain’t kin of yours, that you allus tries to imitate his fine words and speeches, which is most ridic’lous. You never hear me a-talking above myself, though my own sister was a governess, and could write as fine a hand and speak as grand as Lady Jane Dimdale herself; ay, and so can her daughters, Cecil and Grace, as was eddi-

cated at boarding school in Dublin, as Kattern Doyle could certify. But I know my place, I'm thankful to say; I haven't any patience with jackdaws in peacocks' feathers; I was never one myself, my worst enemy can't say as I was."

Before you blame Dame Dorothy too severely for this ebullition of temper, remember how great had been the temptation to wrath. Her husband, a man of manifestly inferior intellect to her own, had taken upon himself to concoct measures for the escape of Colonel Dimdale and Rupert, without so much as consulting her, and, what made the matter worse, they were actually coming to Hollowhill without her previous knowledge or consent.

Certainly self-love must be composed of the three prismatic colours, for it tinges every scene in the drama of life. *Couleur de rose* when successful, blue when beaten,

yellow when in doubt or perplexity ; and, as all nature is tinted and toned by these three prismatic colours, so are the affections and feelings tinged by self-love.

Mr. Danger thrust his hands into his breeches' pockets, and whistled slowly during the latter part of his dame's exordium.

"When you've quite done that toone, Richard Danger, as is the most disheartening toone as ever I *did* hear, perhaps you'll think it worth while to tell me something more of this grand plan of yours an' Rupert's: how many am I expected to put up? and wherever am I to put 'em? have you planned that out too amongst you, without so much as a word to me, as is mistress of Hollowhill? leastwise used to be."

"As soon as ever you've done, dame, you shall hear all about it, an' you have no

call to be angry wi' me nor with Rupert nether. We hadn't time to consult you; Rupert says there ain't any time to be lost, 'for,' says he, 'them Cuffs are greedy after the reward; and,' says he, 'if they happen to think of the cave they'll be sure to search it;' an' so if he lights on the Flukes this evenin', he'll try to get the Colonel over here this very night; but I s'pose you'd sooner he stayed to be took, an' Rupert along with 'im, than come here without a special invitation from the mistress o' Hollowhill."

"No, no, Richard, it ain't so bad as that, nether; I must allus have my say, you know, and I wouldn't be a true woman if I praised a pie I hadn't a finger in; but I misdoubt Rupert will be caught."

"Well, we must hope for the best, dame; meantime, where will you stow away the Colonel?"

"In the lumber-room beyond the kitchen; there's a bed in it this minute, and has been ever since Kattern sprained her ankle and slept there; but wherever I'll hide Rupert and Cecil, goodness on'y knows!"

"You needn't puzzle over that riddle, for neither Rupert nor Cecil be comin' here."

"Not a comin' here! wherever are they going to then? or where should they go, if not to their own kinsfolk, I should like to know?"

"Why just now you was like to eat me because you thought they *was* a-comin'; an' now you're as bad because I tell you they ain't a-comin'. I never seen your equal, Dorothy, for contrariness."

This was a most unusually bold speech for Mr. Danger to venture upon to his wife, who, you probably imagine, became greatly incensed thereat, whereas the exact contrary was the case.



The pupils of her eyes dilated for an instant in rather an ominous manner, but only for an instant. She laid her hand in a kindly way upon her husband's shoulder. "I like a bit of spunk in a man rarely, and I wont be *contrary* any more, Richard," she said in the most peaceful tone; "but where then are Rupert and Cecil going to?"

"That's more than I can say, Dorry; Rupert wouldn't tell me, 'because then,' says he, 'you needn't tell any lies if you're asked after me.'"

"Right enough too, an' now I'll go and get things ready for that old Colonel; happen he'll come to-night if Rupert ain't taken in the streets of Shingleton."

The lumber-room at Hollowhill deserved its name; it was full of boxes, hampers, and worn-out broken furniture, upon which the dust of years had thickly settled.

Behind a heap of miscellaneous rubbish

of the aforesaid description, reposed an iron bedstead, the former resting-place of Catherine Doyle.

Very little preparation was necessary for the reception of the Colonel—the less the better, as secrecy was more essential than comfort, and negligence more likely than neatness to insure the desired result. Dame Dorothy pushed the bed still further into the recesses of the feebly lighted room, piled up a barricade of corn-sacks and hampers before it, and then surveyed her work with a look of mingled satisfaction and disgust. “Bother that old Colonel! he’s more trouble than he’s worth, but I musn’t let him be taken, for Rupert’s and Cecil’s sake; if it wasn’t for them I wouldn’t cover myself with dust and dirt for that old sinner, I know. There, that’ll puzzle sharper men than the Cuffs, or that Painter either, if so be he have the im-

pidence to come here after his behavior to Jane; not that I blame the young man for following Grace, as is far more comely, and better tempered too—though I say it as shouldn't; but Jane's temper and complexion are both sp'ilt, daughter or no daughter, and it's likely as she made more of the man's attentions than she had any warrant for. What now? Lor a massy, Kattern! what a turn you gave me, bouncing in in that way."

"Shure I'm very sorry I startled you, mistress; will I help you move these heavy boxes? I come a-purpose."

"Thank you, Kattern, I believe I've a'most finished; there's a box in yon corner is just the very thing to block that gap up as the sacks don't cover; but I doubt it's too heavy for the two of us."

But Catherine scorned the idea; and with her assistance the chest, which had

defied Mrs. Danger's utmost efforts, was added to the defences.

"There, that will do till the Colonel comes—time enough then for the sheets and blankets; and now, Kattern, we'd best go and clean ourselves, for we are covered with dust, an' I'm as hot as if I'd been b'ilin' over the kitchen fire for an hour."

"Af you plaze, mistress, why wont Mr. Rupert and Miss Cecil come here?" asked Catherine, abruptly.

"I don't know, girl, I'm sure; what sinnifies it to you?" cried Mrs. Danger, sharply, angry at being herself so completely in the dark as to their movements.

"His safety sinnifies to me, for he an' his was orways fren's to me an' mine; an' so was the Meadowses, more pertickler Miss Cecil; an' if it's room you want, you can have mine, mistress, an' welcome; an' more by token it's out o' the way of ivery-

thing, barrin' the rats; an' the trap-door as opens on the 'roof—an' the big tank as hasn't held wather this two year,—that a body might hide in, an' the ladder as leads to the apple-loft from the roof itself; shure it's the very moral of a sacrit hidin'-place—an' why wouldn't they come then?"

"And where would you sleep yourself, Kattern?" said Dame Dorothy, kindly. "I doubt neither Grace nor Jane would be willing to have you, and the yaller room hasn't a morsel of furniture in it."

"Where will I sleep, is it?—anywhere at all—what matters?"

"No, no, Kattern; I'll not have you turned out of bed, not for my own niece; I wont do that."

But Catherine was not to be so easily answered; she had thought over the plan, well, she said, and all she asked was that

Mr. Danger should mention it to Rupert when he drove the cart up to the cross roads that night. If Rupert had formed a better plan, well and good—if not, he might be glad to adopt hers; and as for herself, it was a matter not worth a thought; she could sleep in the kitchen, or “wid the cows in the haggart,” she said, with a laugh. “An’ more nor that, where could they escape from so asy—the say an’ the *Saucy Sally* to the fore, an’ Dick Holder blinded?” The colour mounted to Catherine’s forehead as she said this.

“Dick Holder blinded? whose to blind him?” asked the innocent farmer, who at that moment entered the room.

“Faith, if anny one can blind Dick, I can; an’ I’m not ashamed of owning it, for Dick’s an honest boy,” replied Catherine, boldly, the colour in her face deepening, however, perceptibly.

Mr. Danger stared with open-mouthed astonishment.

"Of course this is noos to you, Mr. Danger, you never see anything further off than the end of your nose—men never do. Why, they've been keeping company these two years; but that's neither here nor there just now. You tell Rupert what Kattern says about the attic an' the tank, and the ladder; they might do worse than come here, for it's handy to the sea; and what she says of Dick Holder is true too, and may happen make their getting off an easier job than it would be without a friend at Court, as they say."

Precisely at midnight, Mr. Danger was at the cross roads; he walked backwards and forwards to keep himself warm, for it was freezing hard, as might be seen by the jets of thick breath issuing from the horse's nostrils.

"I wish them stars as shine so bright, would give us a bit o' heat—it's mortal cold," soliloquized the farmer, as he beat his broad chest with his benumbed hands, to make the blood circulate.

Here we will leave him, and see what chance there is of his being relieved from his watch.

Rupert and the Flukes lost no time in climbing to the top of the cliff; and whilst Bill and Rupert descended to the crow's nest, old Fluke fetched a chair from the cottage. Bill touched his hat to the pale-faced young man who met them at the mouth of the cave, wondering who he could be.

"You don't know me, Bill," said Cecil, blushing with vexation at being seen in her masculine attire.

"I knows your voice, Miss Cecil, least-wise, Mrs. Vicars, I should say; and I'm



oncommon glad to see you lookin' so well ; but we haven't no time to lose, marm ; you'll excoose me for bein' so bold (another touch of the hat), but time and tide waits for no man."

So saying he passed into the cave.

Bill Fluke had the tact which innate delicacy and kindness of heart give to the uneducated peasant, as well as to the peer. Fine feelings, indeed, are by no means inseparable from fine clothes, and so Bill, perceiving Cecil's distress, took no notice of it.

"No wonder you couldn't find the tackle, Mister Rupert; for that gen'leman," pointing to the Colonel, "lays a top on't; you must move ef *you* please, sir."

Colonel Dimdale muttered some inaudible words, but took no further notice. Rupert stooped and lifted him from his bed of rushes as though he had been a child.

"All right, Mister Rupert; hold him in your arms a minute, while I get this here stuff on one side," said Bill, suiting the action to the word, and kicking the Colonel's bed into a corner. He then knelt down, and felt about with his hands amongst the crevices of the rocky floor. "Ah! here 'tis," he exclaimed, pointing to a piece of wire which lay flat amongst the crevices, "jest you take a look at this here dodge, Mister Rupert,—tain't a hevery day trick, I know."

Rupert knelt by his side.

"You see, sir," continued Bill, "this piece of wire as I holds in my hand leads through this here rock; well, it be fastened below to two upright bits o' timber as supports this here big stone; when I pulls the wire, down comes the timber, an' roun' swings the stone on a pivit like—an' a nat'ral pivit too—for he's jammed in so fast

atween his neighbours, as he can't fall, on'y makes a kind of a half traverse."

Bill here exemplified his explanation, and sure enough, the big flat stone which seemed immovably fixed amidst its fellows, swung slowly round, disclosing a good-sized hole.

"That's a very clever contrivance, Bill. Your doing, eh?" said Rupert.

"Me and father did it, Mister Rupert; but we discovered as how the stone would turn, by accident, an' the thing was how to prop him 'up, and how to pull him down; but we mustn't waste time a-talkin', sir; here's all we wants."

He stretched his arm far into the hole, and brought out the end of a long rope.

"Hawl away, Mister Rupert; that's strong enough to hold the *Saucy Sally* in a gale, that is, and here's the caps'an, as I calls it, and here's lashin's for the cheer."

The caps'an was a small but strong windlass, worked by an iron handle; to this Bill quickly fastened one end of the rope. "Now, Mister Rupert," he said, "I'll just run up with this here caps'an; you hold t'other end of the rope, an' when we sends you down the cheer, you lash the Colonel into it, and me an' father will wind him up in no time; you jest steady him, sir, so as he doesn't knock hisself agin the rocks." So saying, he passed the strap that was attached to the windlass over his shoulders, and commenced the ascent.

Dark as was the night, and heavy as was the caps'an, the sturdy Bill soon gained the top, for the path was as well known to him as were the shingles below.

A rope was now made fast to the chair, a slight cord being attached to it to check its downward course. It was lowered away, old Fluke holding the cord or guy, and

paying it out handsomely, and when all was ready, three jerks at the rope was the signal to those above, to wind up. The Colonel was fastened in securely, and the signal given. Slowly the chair began to ascend, Rupert steadying and guarding it from any concussion with the broken and jutting rocks.

Cecil had only herself to look after, and thus the three were soon on the top of the cliff by the side of their coadjutors. The capstan and tackle were speedily stowed away in a secret hiding place in the Cliff Cottage, and the two Flukes, whipping the Colonel up, chair and all, in their muscular arms, set off at a brisk pace for the cross roads, Rupert and Cecil following.

The distance was short, but the path was rough, and many a groan from the sick man bore witness to the jolting, as his

bearers groped and stumbled amidst loose stones and firmly seated rocks.

Arrived at the cross roads, they found the farmer waiting for them, and whilst the two Flukes were hoisting the chair and its burden into the cart, Mr. Danger delivered his message to Rupert.

"Well," replied the latter, "we had arranged with our friends the Flukes to go to Dummer to-night; but it is a long walk for Cecil, and if you and Mrs. Danger will take her in, I shall be very glad; we were delicate about coming to you ourselves, as of course, the greater number you have to conceal, the greater will be the risk and the inconvenience."

"But you must both come," said the farmer; "my orders is to bring you both; Dorothy will expect you."

To this, however, Rupert would by no means agree. In the first place, he argued

that there would be nothing strange in Cecil paying them a visit at Hollowhill, and her name not being in the "Hue and Cry," no concealment was necessary; with him it would be very different, he was on too large a scale to be easily hidden—he laughingly observed—his presence there would imperil them all; besides, he thought it best that he should lie concealed at Dummer, where he could more readily arrange matters with the Flukes for crossing the water. It was therefore so settled, and Cecil took her place by the side of Colonel Dimdale without a word of remonstrance.

This slavish obedience to the will of her husband, sounds very contemptible to you? It was most unheroine-like, I own, conduct not to be justified by any precedent that I am aware of. She should, of course, have declared that nothing but

death should part her from her husband, and that she would share his perils and privations, watch over his safety and minister to his wants. She, however, did nothing of the sort; on the contrary, she quietly seated herself in the cart after receiving one kiss and one whispered adieu.

Mr. Danger speedily followed, and drove noiselessly off over the well-trodden snow.

Cecil's heart beat quick, and her eyes filled with tears as she lost sight of Rupert's tall form towering over the humbler-sized Flukes; but her pale face was calm, and her voice was steady when, in reply to her uncle's inquiries, she said she was very comfortable.

And yet Cecil was a tender-hearted loving woman, with feelings and passions of the strongest kind. Little did any, but those who knew her well, suspect how



fierce a volcano burned beneath that crust of snow; certainly her uncle Danger did not. He had expected a scene when Rupert declared his determination not to accompany his wife to Hollowhill, and was rather disappointed with Cecil for submitting so quietly to his decision. He ruminated over this "heartless behaviour of his niece" the whole way home, and could come to no satisfactory conclusion or explanation; when suddenly it struck the honest man, how he had heard that "the quality" always most carefully concealed any expression of feeling, and no doubt Cecil had learnt this art at the boarding-school, along with her French and her other accomplishments. She might, after all then, have such a thing as a heart; he would speak to Dame Dorothy on the subject—and there she is on the door-step with Catherine Doyle and Grace Meadows

on either side of her; Catherine holding on high a huge stable-lantern, the light of which nearly blinded Cecil as she stepped down from the cart.





## CHAPTER X.

### IN THE ROOKERY.

**T** daybreak the following morning, two men were staggering along the beach towards Shingleton; their heads drooped on their chests, and they stumbled at every step.

As they entered the village they were overtaken by a stout-built young man in a rough pea-coat and a glazed hat.

“Hullo!” said the new comer; “what’s up now? Why, Bob! Tom! whatever have you two been at?”

The men raised their heads; their faces were purple with cold and their teeth chattered so that they could scarcely speak intelligibly.

“We b-be amo-o-ost fro-o-o-oze,” Tom Cuff managed to say at last; to which Bob added “Gi-gi-give us a dro-dro-dro-drop o’ bra-a-a-a-an’y.”

The request was instantly complied with, and Bob Cuff, applying the flask to his lips, would have drained it dry, had not Tom, who eagerly watched the gradual rise of the bottom of the flask, snatched it away when he considered that the lower extremity had attained a sufficient elevation, and helped himself to what remained.

The spirit sent a glow through their shivering limbs, and loosed their tongues, and before they reached the Jolly Mariners, Dick Holder was sufficiently interested in their story to follow them into the inner parlour and hear “the whole yarn spun,” as he observed with a playful slap on Bob Cuff’s back, which propelled him through his own door at an angle of

forty-five—a mode of progression popularly known as head foremost.

The tale was told, though it took some time in the telling, owing principally to the frequent interruptions caused by volleys of oaths and platoons of execrations, which none but a Cuff may utter or write. Dick Holder was a humorous youth; perhaps his intimacy with Catherine Doyle had given him a turn for fun, though I think he must have been naturally “a mad wag,” as dear old shameful Falstaff hath it. Certainly the ludicrous side of the picture presented to him by the “Hand-cuffs” affected him more than the pathetic, for at the conclusion of their story, he burst into an immoderate fit of laughter—much to the disgust of his companions.

In vain did Tom Cuff dilate upon the cruelty of their treatment, in vain Ugly

Bob—who looked uglier than ever—pointed to his hands, still swelled and purple from cold, and painted in strong colours the chattering, shivering wretchedness of his night watch; the more vivid the picture, the more graphic the description, the louder laughed the inhuman Dick Holder.

“D——n you!” shouted Robert at last, “I wish you’d a-bin sittin’ on that ’ere stone half t’ night: you’d laugh t’other side o’ yer mouth—you would.”

“Why, what a brace of blockheads you two fellows are, to be sure! When you was smugglers, you was allus being caught napping, and now you’re constables it’s all one, you’re done at every ’turn.”

“How was we to know as that ’ere p’liceman would play us sich a trick?” growled Bob.

“P’liceman, you great gaby!—he was no

p'liceman; no one would a took him for a p'liceman but two such softs."

"What was 'e then? you, as purtends to be so much wiser nor other folk, may happen know who 'en was," said Tom, savagely.

"Well, I can give a gay guess from what you and Bob say; I expect the grand London p'liceman was Rupert Vicars."

It was some time before the Cuffs would allow themselves to believe in the possibility of Dick Holder's supposition. The passage of a new idea through the thick fog which enveloped their thin intelligence, was, of necessity, a slow process; at length the truth dawned upon them, and if the heavens did not quake at the might of their wrath, the table did, at the might of their fists. Rupert Vicars was fiercely denounced, and consigned to a region of more than tropical intensity, whither it was

firmly and fervently hoped the Enemy of Mankind might speedily convey him; in the meantime, during his short sojourn upon earth, they, the Cuffs, would pursue him with relentless enmity.

The more they swore and the harder they thumped the table, the broader became the grin upon Dick Holder's handsome face; his bright blue eyes seemed positively to dance with mirth, and, even the ends of his straight black hair, to quiver with sympathetic delight.

But, even as no lane has as yet been discovered without a turning, so cannot laughter for ever flow in a direct course. And thus it came to pass that as Dick Holder walked towards his home, it was no longer the misfortunes of the Cuffs, but the cleverness and daring of Rupert Vicars, that provoked the ready laugh.

"It *was* Mister Rupert then, after all, as



I see t'other night by the Cliff Cottage; I thought so," he muttered. "I'd have given a pound to have seen him posting them two nincompoops. It was bravely done too, to go into the Jolly Mariners, an' he in the 'Hue and Cry.' Just like him! —Mister Rupert never had a fear—never. But shall I ever forget the faces of them Cuffs when I met 'em?—Ugly Bob's in per-tickler! Ugly! why, ugly ain't no name for it—it were enough to make a cow laugh—it beat all ever I see."

The vision of poor Bob's ludicrous appearance sent Dick into a fresh roar of laughter.

"I must tell Kate of this," he continued; "how she will enjoy it! I'll go up to Hollowhill this very day a-purpose, but I'll turn in and get a wink o' sleep first, or I wont be fit to be sin."

Perhaps you think that only "the

nobility" care whether or no they are fit to be seen? You are mistaken, for although a youthful poet of great promise, long since departed, saith, as near as I can remember—

'It was a lovely day,  
The lords and ladies were making love,  
And the louts were making hay,'

yet, believe me, louts make love as well as hay, occasionally, and when they do, they, too, adorn themselves and put on fine clothes—if they possess them.

Well might Dick Holder require a "wink o' sleep," for he had been on the look-out the whole night, it having been reported that "a run" would be attempted before morning, somewhere along the coast in that neighbourhood. Dick drew the house-key from beneath the thatch, and let himself in; then took off his heavy boots and crept softly to his bed, lest haply he might disturb

his mother, with whom he lived, and whom he loved dearly and tended carefully.

Mrs. Holder had seen better days; her husband had lived and died in the honoured capacity of the Shingleton school-master.

Richard Holder—the elder—would not have been considered at all a fit person for a schoolmaster in these erudite days, for he knew nothing either of trigonometry, geology, or zoology; and his geographical lore extended no further than Dummer on the left, distant five miles; Dane-street on the right, about the same distance; and the Rookery—the seat of Lady Jane Dimdale—three miles to the rear of Shingleton. Mr. Holder had, of course, heard of London, and believed in its existence; but his ideas of the modern Babylon were so entirely incorrect, that he might as well have ignored its bodily presence upon the

earth, as he did that of most other capitals in Europe.

“They mought or they moughtn’t be, but, for his part, he’d never sin ’em, and he’d lived long enough not to b’lieve more nor half he seed, an’ nothin’ he heard.”

Such was the creed of the late Mr. Holder; we cannot commend, but we will not criticise it. Peace to his “manes;” he was a good man in his vocation, and conscientiously performed his duty to his pupils, caning and cramming them to the best of his ability.

Mrs. Holder assisted her husband in the education of the Shingleton girls; whilst he taught them to write and to read, she imparted to them the mysteries of the needle. Mrs. Holder’s samples of knitting and hem-stitch,—second to none in her day,—had obtained a provincial notoriety. She had also a fair smattering of the

culinary art, and her house was a model of neatness. These homely qualities she was always ready to teach those who were willing to learn; but of crochet, embroidery, or satin-stitch, she was as ignorant as was her husband of Euclid or the use of the globes.

In extenuation of the parish authorities employing such unlearned people as the Holders to instruct the youth of Shingleton, I must observe, that, in the dark age of which I write, it was not considered necessary for housemaids and footmen to be good arithmeticians, correct orthographers, or even cunning artificers in ornamental gewgaws. Such a stride towards perfection in the education of the lower orders is comparatively of recent date.

Among the many advantages of the present most excellent system of education, may be ranked, higher wages, less work, a

love of finery, and a love of change. The estimable ladies and sagacious gentlemen whose aspirations for a higher standard of education for the masses, reflect equal credit on their hearts and heads, may yet see the day when a French governess and a piano-forte are acknowledged necessities for the village school.

Then will Mary the housemaid and Molly the cook join John and Buttons in a merry roundelay! Then will Hobnailed Will, the gardener's boy, don his pumps and "foot it featly" with Sue the kitchen wench. Then, too, may the industrious spider spin her gossamer threads and stretch her delicate tracery from beam to beam, unmolested by brush or broom; then will the maid grow fat and the mistress lean; then will the yellow-flowered groundsel and purple thistle flourish side by side with the potato and the cabbage.

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"Lor' a massy, Cecil! Run up to your sister's room and change your clothes; I declare it gives me quite a turn to see you in that indecent dress," were the first words spoken by Dame Dorothy to her niece.

Colonel Dimdale was conducted to the lumber room: all he asked was to be left alone. This moderate request was immediately, and, I may add, joyfully complied with.

Cecil lay down on her sister's bed to rest, perchance to sleep, for a few hours, as she was to start again on a short journey soon after daylight.

As her presence at Hollowhill was not to be kept secret, it was necessary to account for her arrival there. It had therefore been arranged that her uncle should drive her over to the Rookery before any of the farm servants were on the move, and bring her

back later in the day. Cecil had frequently been staying at the Rookery, and her coming from that place would excite no comment. Her marriage with Rupert was of so recent a date that it was not generally known; and even had it been known, her appearance at Hollowhill would in no wise have jeopardized his safety. To whom was Cecil so likely to flee for shelter, as to her aunt Dorothy? and where so unlikely for Rupert to flee for safety, as to the neighbourhood where he was sufficiently well known to be easily recognised?

Lady Jane Dimdale has finished her toilette, but she still sits at her dressing-table pondering over the "Hue and Cry," which some officious friend had sent her. She must have been a very beautiful woman in her youth; even now, although verging upon sixty, she is still beautiful. The gentle hazel eyes and soft brown hair,



slightly streaked with silver, suit well the delicate cheek and fair skin. Are her teeth false? surely they must be, they are so white and even. You are wrong, there is nothing false about Lady Jane Dimdale.

The Rookery belonged to Lady Jane, and there she dwelt with her son during his minority; our friend Rupert, the agent of the Irish property, inhabiting Rockmoor Castle *pro tempore*.

There was sorrow on Lady Jane's kind face this morning as she took up the "Hue and Cry," and descended to the breakfast-room, where she found the butler awaiting her.

"Af you plaze, me leedy, Misther Danger wud spake wid yer leedyship."

"Show him in, Doyle. How is your cold this morning?"

"Faith, it's nothin' at all, on'y jest a little pleasant ticklin' in my weazin', divil a more, an' many thanks, me leedy."

Lady Jane shook her head reprovingly. "‘Nothing more,’ Doyle, would have been as easy to say, and would have sounded better."

"Ah! me leedy, shure it manes nothin' an' isn't swearin' at all; I'd scorn to be so ondelicate as to swear in yer leedyship's prisince."

"It sounds very like it, Doyle; but send Farmer Danger in, and try and break yourself of that bad habit; do so to please me, even if you do not think it wrong yourself."

This little lecture was given in a low, musical voice, accompanied by a kindly smile.

The butler bowed, and left the room hastily, for he suddenly felt a choking sensation in his throat, which required relief. He found it whilst pursuing his way to the housekeeper's room, in the following soliloquy. "Larry Doyle, you ill-mannered

baste, I'll cut the tongue out o' yer head, I will; may the divil—hem—may nothin' run away wid ye for an ongrashis wagabone; times out o' mind yer leedy has tould you niver to mintion that gintleman's name, an' she so good an' so kind an' so affleble—not but what our Irish divil is in comparashun wid the great bletherin Saxon divil, a harmless poor craythur—quite insignificint an' contemptshus; but her leedyship does not like him the more for that; an' by this an' by that, Larry Doyle, if you don't dhrop his acquaintance, I'll knock the ugly head aff yer shoulders, so I will." Larry wound up his admonition by administering a sound cuff to the side of his face, as a practical illustration of what he might expect if he persisted in outraging his kind lady's feelings.

Mrs. Bliss the housekeeper had been "all of a fluster" at Mrs. Vicars condescending

to pay her a visit. "My lady would be quite angry she didn't go to the breakfast-room at once—she hoped Mr. Rupert was well; she wouldn't be so bold as to offer Mrs. Vicars a cup of tea, as, of course, she would breakfast with her ladyship."

Mrs. Bliss was an immense woman, so fat that she waddled as she walked, and so tall that Farmer Danger looked like a little boy by her side. Like all large animals, she was exceedingly good-tempered, except when things went wrong in the kitchen over which she presided.

Mrs. Bliss had been cook and housekeeper at Rockmoor Castle for many years, and consequently knew the Vicars' and Meadows' families well; she had been much attached to Cecil's mother, and was one of those who upheld her character when it was aspersed by the calumnies of Jacob Dimdale. She had always looked upon her

as a real lady, for was she not governess to her young master and Miss Dimdale? and did not Lady Jane invariably treat her on terms of perfect equality?—and did she not give Mrs. Meadows' two daughters, Cecil and Grace, the very best education which could be had for love or money? And indeed love had a great deal to do with it, for she, Mrs. Bliss, knew well how fond Lady Jane was of both the girls, especially of Cecil—who seemed to have taken the place in her heart which the death of her own daughter some years previously had left vacant. So fond was Lady Jane of these two girls that she constantly had one or other of them staying with her as companion and friend; and it was but lately that she had stood by Cecil's side at the altar in St. — Church, and given her, together with a handsome present—to her confidential agent, Rupert Vicars.

Mr. Danger, followed closely by Cecil, presented himself at the breakfast-room door.

"Come in, Mr. Danger," said Lady Jane; "you are an early visitor; no bad news, I hope? Ha! Cecil! you here too? where is Rupert? and my unfortunate brother—where is he?"

"You have seen the 'Hue and Cry,' Lady Jane?" were Cecil's first words.

"It is here," said Lady Jane, tapping it with her finger.

"You do not believe that Rupert has done anything wrong, dear Lady Jane?" said Cecil, eagerly.

"No, my child, I do not; ah! you will kiss me now!"

"Now and always, my dear, kind benefactress; but I was afraid you might think that Rupert had been led away to do what was wrong, and I could not bear you to suppose so even for an instant."

Cecil knelt by Lady Jane's side, took both her hands in hers, and looked up into her face with quivering lip and tearful eyes.

"I never did—never could suspect Rupert of dishonesty for an instant, dear child," said Lady Jane, folding her in her arms and kissing her tenderly.

Cecil could not have wept on Aunt Dorothy's bosom, much as she liked her; and she had thought it her duty to restrain her grief before Grace; but here, on the bosom of her second mother—the kindest, the dearest, the most loving of friends—she could give way unrestrainedly.

What woman has not felt the luxury of letting her tears flow unchecked?—tears that have been struggling to the surface for hours and days—but which have been forced back to the depths whence they sprang—by an inflexible will and a stern sense of duty.

The dangers that Cecil had undergone, the disguise she had been compelled to adopt, and, above all, the shame, though undeserved, which attached to Rupert's name, and her constant dread of his being taken, had tried her powers of mental endurance to the utmost. She had borne up bravely whilst in action, but now that her task, for the time, was over—now that the necessity for self-command was removed—her woman's feelings asserted their rightful prerogative, and she wept like a little child.

Lady Jane suffered her to weep on without a word of remonstrance; she laid one hand upon her head, and with the other drew her more closely towards herself.

In the meantime, Mr. Danger stood twisting his hat round and round by a dexterous application of his two thumbs and forefingers to the broad brim, and,



looking alternately from Lady Jane to Cecil, said to himself, "Whatever can Cecil be crying for? wetting Lady Jane's handsome silk dress so shamefully, and how can her ladyship allow it?" He cleared his throat once or twice in hopes of attracting his niece's attention, and then he turned very red at the noise he had made.

Lady Jane looked up and caught sight of the farmer's perplexed and anxious countenance.

"Take a chair, Mr. Danger; Cecil will be all the better for this relief to her feelings, poor child! she must have gone through a great deal the last few days. A sad ending this to your honeymoon, my dear," continued Lady Jane; "but we cannot always have sunshine, you know, and we must bear stormy weather, when it comes, in patience and hope; for we know that the storms which sweep over

our hearts—as over the earth—are for our good.”

How one clings to a loving heart when in sorrow! A kind word—a gentle smile—strike a chord in the human breast, which neither rank nor riches, honour nor renown, can touch. Lady Jane’s voice was singularly soft, her smile singularly sweet.

“It is very selfish of me,” said Cecil, rising from her knees, “to give way in this manner, dear Lady Jane, when you have so much more cause for sorrow—but—but I could not help it—indeed, I could not help it.”

“I am very glad you did not help it, my dear; you needed a good cry to set you right, and you have had one! Yes, I have, as you say, more cause for sorrow than you have, for your husband is innocent, and my brother is guilty—though how guilty I

do not know—perhaps you can tell me, Cecil, and also where he is?”

“Colonel Dimdale is at Hollowhill, and Rupert is at Dummer. We wish to get Colonel Dimdale across the water if possible, and I am to stay at Hollowhill, that I may communicate with Rupert.”

“And of what is my brother accused? tell me the worst at once, Cecil,” for she saw she hesitated.

“Of embezzlement, and—and forgery.”

Lady Jane turned very pale, and her lips moved as if in prayer.

“And Rupert—how is he implicated?” she asked, in a tremulous tone.

“I will tell you. Rupert met Colonel Dimdale accidentally in the street about a week after our marriage. The Colonel asked him to lend him 5000*l.* for three months, saying that he knew he had the money, as he had just received the Irish

rents. Rupert refused, and Colonel Dimdale pressed him hard, saying that he would give him any security he pleased, and twenty per cent. interest; but Rupert still refused; upon which the Colonel was very angry, called Rupert an ungrateful upstart, and swore to make him repent his disobliging insolence, as he was pleased to call it. Twenty-four hours afterwards Colonel Dimdale suddenly walked into our apartments—how he found us out I cannot tell, he must have followed Rupert home. I was in the bed-room, which opened out of our sitting-room, when Colonel Dimdale came in. The first words he uttered were, ‘Is anyone with you, Rupert Vicars?’ ‘No one but my wife,’ was the answer. ‘Ha! your wife—well, no matter, she can do me no harm,’ replied the Colonel; and then after a slight pause he continued—‘You would not oblige me the other day,

as you easily might have done, and I swore to make you repent your refusal. I generally keep my oaths—and I have kept that one.’”

Cecil stopped abruptly, and starting forward, knelt once more at Lady Jane’s feet. Lady Jane was deadly pale, and trembled violently.

“Go on, my dear,” she said, faintly. “I had rather hear it all—go on, in his very words, if you can remember them.”

Cecil obeyed. “‘I have forged my nephew’s name,’ the Colonel said, ‘to a bill for 5000*l.*, and *you* have accepted it.’ You may fancy Rupert’s astonishment at this announcement. ‘*I* accepted it! you rave, Colonel Dimdale,’ he said. Colonel Dimdale laughed. ‘Your name is at the back of the bill at all events—*our* forgery of my nephew’s name has been detected, but your acceptance has been pronounced all right,

and there are warrants out against us both.' 'You forged my name as well as that of your nephew,' said Rupert. 'I did,' said the Colonel, 'and yours more successfully than his, it seems; you have a peculiar flourish with your R's, which I hit off marvellously well.'

"Oh, Lady Jane!" cried Cecil, throwing her arms round her in time to save her from falling. She had fainted.





## CHAPTER XI.

### EXPLANATIONS.



T surprises you that the wrongdoings of Colonel Dimdale should have affected Lady Jane so strongly; you have already said in your heart, possibly with your lips, "This is unnatural—he is only her brother-in-law." I feel the justice of your remark, and hasten to account for the apparent superfluity of feeling displayed by her ladyship.

When the Lady Jane Droxford, the only daughter of the Earl of Eggerton, made her first appearance in the largest and ugliest capital in Europe, she was, by general consent, pronounced the *belle* of the

season, and was accordingly worshipped by the votaries of Fashion, the disciples of Venus, and the followers of Mammon, for she was heiress to her mother's property, an estate situated in the West of England, of fabulous extent and of romantic beauty.

To whom are we, the ignorant public, indebted for our knowledge touching the expectations of the youthful sirens who year by year enchant, mystify, and enslave us with their fatal witcheries and sweet allurements? Who tells us all about them? Is it the "man round the corner," whom no one sees, but whom all trust? is it he who knows the secrets of all stables? who can destroy the reputation of the Maid of Athens, by Socrates out of Xenophon's dam, by a wink, and send the first favourite for the Derby from the post of honour by a shrug? Is it Mr. Private Information, I say, who thus kindly takes under his pro-



tection the reigning *belles* as well as the running horses? shows their paces, chants their pedigrees, and puffs their pretensions? I cannot say; but certain it is, that the worldly endowments of each separate siren *are* jotted down with more or less accuracy, upon the loose leaves of memory;—which leaves, somehow or other, seem to contain a more varied fund of intelligence than the ponderous volume of memory itself, whence they have fluttered: a volume compiled with much toil and trouble, and perfected with deep study; receiving so many impressions, yet conveying so little information.

Among the Lady Jane Droxford's many suitors was one Jacob Dimdale—a Captain in the Blues—handsome, clever, and agreeable.

At the expiration of a month's undeviating attention, Captain Dimdale con-

sidered himself justified in proposing for Lady Jane, and the result proved the correctness of his conclusions. He was accepted, and great was his joy; but transient as great, for Fate, in the shape of an anonymous letter, informed Lady Jane the very day after her acceptance of the gallant Captain, of certain circumstances in the past life of her adorer, which implied heartless villany on his part, and shame and disgrace to the anonymous writer.

This letter Lady Jane gave to her mother, who showed it to the impatient and triumphant Captain. He did not repel the accusation; indeed it had been useless so to do, for the anonymous writer had added yet these words: "Should Captain Dimdale deny one word I have stated, I will send you my name and address." The bold dragoon was at first greatly confused, but his natural impudence and artificial *àplomb*

soon set him at his ease: 'He certainly had been wild, but not more so than many others he could mention; however, he had sowed his wild oats and never meant to sow any more: he was sure he should make a pattern husband—with Lady Jane as his guide how could he wander from the right path? and as for this business, (touching the letter with the lash of his riding-whip), if all the circumstances were known, it would be found that he was not so much to blame (Oh Jacob Dimdale! Jacob Dimdale!); and hard indeed it would be if a man were to have all the peccadillos of his youth brought against him when he sought to settle for life, and become a respectable member of society.' Much more he said, and said well, for, with the venom, Jacob Dimdale had also the wile of the serpent.

Lady Eggerton was a woman of the world, the reverse of what is usually termed

“strait-laced.” Consequently Captain Dimdale’s conduct did not appear to her so black as I am sure it does to you, gentle reader. She too believed that all young men were wild; she too, adopted that miserable and transparent falsehood, that “a reformed rake makes the best husband,” or, at all events, a sufficiently good husband—provided he be *comme il faut* in every other respect—*i.e.*, well-born, well-dressed, and well-found.

Lady Eggerton palliated Captain Dimdale’s conduct and advocated his cause with her daughter; winding up a rather long and very stupid eulogy (stupid, because evidently false) upon the manners and customs of society, by the following striking aphorism, more remarkable for its truth than its originality—“If you never marry till you meet with perfection, you will die an old maid.”

Her mother's sophistry failed to satisfy the Lady Jane. She did not expect perfection in a husband, but she expected good principles. These, she ascertained by inquiries, Captain Dimdale did not possess; on the contrary, it appeared that he had pursued a vicious course from his earliest youth.

No sooner was this fact established beyond dispute, than Lady Jane dismissed the gay dragoon at once and for ever. Her mother cared very little about the matter, for although Captain Dimdale had 20,000*l.*, and there was only one brother between him and a baronetcy worth 15,000*l.* a year, still there were better bargains to be had, and Lady Jane was but just eighteen.

Singularly enough, this one brother, Charles Dimdale, was the very person whom eventually the Lady Jane married.

This was indeed adding insult to injury—more especially when an heir to the baronetcy made his appearance. The Captain considered himself a victim to prudery and prejudice, and he never forgave the woman who had both rejected and supplanted him.

She, on the contrary, could not forget that her maiden affections had been given to Jacob Dimdale, and although she had long since ceased to regard him in any other light than that of an erring brother, one whom she could neither like nor respect, still the memory of the past would at times rise up before her, startling her in its intensity; and when Cecil proclaimed Colonel Dimdale a felon and a fugitive, a vision of the handsome youth who had knelt at her feet, and poured forth vows of eternal love and constancy—vows too which had been believed and accepted—

had suddenly arisen in all its pristine force and beauty, and had overpowered her.

During this long explanation and digression, you will be pleased to imagine Lady Jane in an unfit state to hear further particulars. She is now, however, sufficiently recovered to bid Cecil continue her story, which she did in the following words:—

“‘You are astonished, Rupert Vicars,’ said the Colonel to my husband, ‘at my coming here to tell you this, instead of providing for my safety, and leaving you to do the same. Well, I am rather astonished at it myself, since my doing so proceeds, in a great measure from a feeling of good-nature, a very unusual sensation on my part; but also because I think we may assist each other in our escape.’

“The audacity and coolness of the Colonel’s proposal, astounded Rupert to such a

degree that he could scarcely credit the evidence of his senses, and for a minute or two he made no reply; at length he said—‘Colonel Dimdale, you surely do not expect that I shall allow you to leave this room except in the custody of a policeman?’

“The Colonel smiled his cold cynical smile, and drew out his watch. ‘We have two hours yet,’ he said. ‘The coach starts at six, and it will take you only a quarter of an hour to go to the Bull and Mouth; but perhaps you may have some arrangements to make, so I will be brief. I will not talk of obligations and gratitude; the more you owe to our family the less likely you are to assist one of its members—no one is fond of paying debts of any description; but I will appeal to the strongest, instead of to the weakest motive power with which I am acquainted; namely, self-in-



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terest. You have good sense and good judgment, Rupert ; be pleased to exercise both at present, and do not let prejudice or passion warp either the one or the other. I have determined not to be taken alive ; if you send for a policeman, the moment he enters the room, I shall blow my brains out ; see here (he showed the butt of a small pistol). That is nothing to you, you probably think—you are mistaken. Your signature to the forged bill is so perfectly imitated, that you will have great difficulty in proving it to be false. I am certain that those who know your handwriting best, would be the first to swear to its genuine character ; besides which, together with other papers unimportant to myself, I have a letter from you that will be in the hands of the police to-night ; in it you say, “I agree to your proposal, provided you agree to my terms, which I do not think exorbi-

tant considering the risk I run." It is a masterpiece of penmanship—I am proud of it; you could not possibly resist the damning evidence of that letter, and the signature on the bill, without my assistance—which assistance you could not have, you understand, if I were dead; but which you shall have the moment we are on the other side of the water. I will then give you, in writing, an acknowledgment of the false character both of the letter and the acceptance, and you can return to England as soon as you please.'

"Rupert, as you may imagine, dear Lady Jane, was sorely puzzled how to act. His duty seemed clear—he ought, at all hazards, to arrest Colonel Dimdale then and there; but he could not bring himself to do so; he could not consign to ignominy, the son of his own father's best and kindest friend

and benefactor. The struggle in his mind was severe, but short; he would assist him. 'Colonel Dimdale,' he said, 'I will go with you, I will help you to escape out of the country, not because of your threatened suicide, and the consequent difficulty I should have in proving my innocence; but solely and entirely out of that feeling of gratitude which you pretend to ignore. I *cannot* deliver you over to the fate to which your misdeeds would consign you. I know that in strict morality this decision is wrong, and I trust I may be forgiven for acting against my conscience; but, I repeat, I cannot be instrumental in bringing disgrace and misery on any one bearing the name of Dimdale; however just the punishment might be.'

"The Colonel again laughed his horrid laugh; it made my flesh creep to hear him. 'You have decided right, Ru-

pert; we wont quarrel as to the reasons that have brought about so proper a conclusion. The fact is, I have a plan in my head, which I could not very well carry out without your help; so much for my good-nature, eh? ha, ha! You know the coast well, near to my dear, delightful sister-in-law's place; now it strikes me that we might get across from that neighbourhood easier than from any other. It would be useless to attempt one of the great sea-ports, you know, and we should neither of us be suspected of making for that part of the country, where both are, or at all events were, tolerably well known. What do you say?' 'Before I answer that, or any other question,' replied Rupert, 'I wish to state the terms upon which I will assist you.' 'My dear fellow, name them; will a thousand pounds do? I am not going away *in formá pauperis*; I might as well

stay and be hanged, as escape and be starved; but you must wait till we are over the water, and I can transmute some greasy parchments I have here (touching his pocket), into glittering gold. I have not more ready money than we shall want for travelling expenses, including bribery, which, I take it, will be a heavyish item.'

"I saw my husband's face flush, and he half rose from his chair, but he sat down again, and said quietly, 'You only judge men according to your experience, Colonel Dimdale; which I am afraid has not been gained from the most respectable sources; it would, therefore, be absurd in me to be angry or to feel annoyed with your view of human nature when applied to myself. If the money you offer me were your own, which it is not, I would not take a penny of it. My terms are simply that you write on this (placing a sheet of paper

before him), an acknowledgment that the letter you spoke of, and the acceptance, are both forgeries; and, moreover, that you distinctly state that I never had to do, either directly or indirectly, with any of your illegal acts.' Again the Colonel laughed his mocking laugh—'Do you take me for a fool, Rupert Vicars? With that paper in your possession you are safe, and it is not very likely that you would take much trouble on my account. No, no, the moment we land on the other side of the water, that acknowledgment is yours, but not a moment before.' Rupert made no reply, but got up, locked the entrance door, and, putting the key in his pocket, sat down again. 'Oh, very well,' said the Colonel, taking out his pistol, 'if that's your game, the matter will soon be settled. Perhaps you fancy I have not the nerve to shoot

myself; you will find you are mistaken. I know a policeman's step pretty well, and the moment I hear it outside that door, I pull the trigger—not at you, you need not be afraid—I have enough to answer for already, without tacking on murder to the catalogue.'

“‘I told you that I would assist you to escape out of the country, Colonel Dimdale, and so I will, if you instantly write the acknowledgment I require; but if you refuse, your blood be on your own head. I owe it to myself and to my family to wipe the foul stain from my character which you have dared to cast upon it. It is possible, that, in spite of my best endeavours to save you, you may be taken: or you may destroy yourself as you threaten, to prevent capture; I should then have to stand my trial for a crime I loathe; I should have to stand in a felon's dock, and,

although I have no doubt of my acquittal, I will not run the chance of this shame—though it be but temporary—for any man breathing.’ ‘So much for your fine feelings of gratitude, Rupert Vicars,’ said the Colonel, with insulting bitterness; ‘I never heard a fellow prate of gratitude that was not a cur at heart.’

“Colonel Dimdale leaned back in his chair, folded his arms across his breast, with the pistol still in his hand, and tapped the floor quickly and impatiently with the heel of his boot. It seemed to me that he was a shade paler after Rupert’s last speech, but it might have been fancy. Both were silent for several minutes. Oh, Lady Jane! I hope never to pass such a fearful time again; the minutes seemed hours in the intensity of silent expectation; expectation of what?—of murder, of suicide. Ha! here it comes, I said so myself. A step was



distinctly heard approaching our door. Colonel Dimdale raised his pistol, and put the muzzle to his forehead; I stood petrified with horror—I dared not scream—I dared not move.

“ ‘That is the man who lodges above us; you do not know a policeman’s tread so well as you pretend, Colonel Dimdale,’ said Rupert, quietly. The step passed by, and the Colonel lowered his pistol.

“ ‘I think the touch of the cold steel on his forehead must have frightened him; he moved on his chair once or twice, and looked restless and uneasy; at length he said, ‘Rupert, will you swear to be true to me, and to do your best to assist my escape, if I give you the acknowledgment you require?’ ‘I will—and you ought to know me well enough to trust me, Colonel Dimdale.’ ‘Well, then I *will* trust you—in fact I can’t help it, for you are as obstinate as a

mule. Here, quick! give me the implements.'

"The acknowledgment being written, the Colonel handed it to Rupert, saying, 'There, will that satisfy you? After all, it would be absurd to take the law into my own hands whilst there is a chance of escaping it altogether.' 'That will do perfectly,' said Rupert, folding up the paper and putting it in his pocket; 'and now, Colonel Dimdale, I am at your service.' 'Very well, then; be at the Bull and Mouth a few minutes before six; we will arrange our plans as we go down.'

"The Colonel being gone, I entered the room. 'I have heard everything, Rupert,' I said. 'So I suppose,' he replied; 'do you think me a fool for having agreed to assist him?' I said I did not, and that I felt bound to assist him also, for I re-

membered the vow I had made to my mother.

“Rupert then began to tell me what I was to do during his absence; but I declared my intention of accompanying him. I could not—oh, Lady Jane—I *could* not let him go on so dangerous an errand alone; so soon after our marriage too. Was I wrong, do you think?”

“No, dear child, I think you were right; if your presence neither endangered nor embarrassed him.”

“He said it would do both, and besides, that I did not know what difficulties and privations I might have to undergo; but at length he yielded to my prayers and entreaties, and he has since confessed that he was glad he had done so, as I had been of great use both to him and Colonel Dimdale. But, Lady Jane (Cecil’s face and neck crimsoned as she proceeded), I was compelled to

adopt man's attire; I could not possibly wear my own clothes, Rupert said, so he went out and bought me a sailor's dress, and a tarpaulin hat; and I got down stairs without being observed. At the coach-office, we found the Colonel walking up and down the yard, disguised, of course. He started on seeing me, and eagerly asked Rupert who I was. 'My Cousin Cecil,' he replied (which is the truth, you know); adding, 'he will be of use to us; he is as trustworthy as myself.' The Colonel, I perceived, did not like my being there, but he merely said, 'I have taken the whole of the inside of the coach; so perhaps it is as well that your cousin is here; they might be inquisitive, and ask impertinent questions if two people took four seats.' The coachman mounted his box, and the guard hurried by with the huge letter-bags under his arm. At that moment a policeman

passed the window; my heart stood still, and I saw Colonel Dimdale, who had also perceived him, turn deadly pale. Oh, Lady Jane! the misery I endured until we started, is impossible to describe; what Colonel Dimdale's feelings must have been, I cannot even imagine. The coachman, the guard, the ostlers, all seemed to be talking and laughing about *us*. 'Time's up,' said the guard. 'All right behind there? hold fast, gentlemen,' I heard the Coachman say, and the horses' feet clattered on the pavement—there was a sudden jerk, which nearly threw me into Rupert's lap, and we were off. I know not to this day whether that policeman was looking for us; but I *do* know that the time, passed in that yard, I would not pass over again for untold gold.

"The Colonel drew a long breath as we emerged from beneath the archway into

the street. 'Did you see that policeman, Rupert?' he asked. 'Yes, but he could scarcely have been after us, or he would have stopped the coach.' 'I suppose so; but I seem to think that every one I see is after us,' said the Colonel. 'Well, have you made any plan?' he asked suddenly. Rupert proceeded to tell him, that he could think of no better place of concealment than the Cliff Cottage. The Colonel interrupted him hastily, 'I will not be indebted to Lady Jane Dimdale, even for a night's lodging in a hovel; you know that cottage belongs to her,' he said. Yes, Rupert was aware of that, but if he wished to escape from his pursuers, he must put piques and prejudices on one side. The Colonel growled something in reply, which I could not hear, but made no further objection.

"Rupert then stated that he believed the

Cliff Cottage to be untenanted; if so it would doubtless be locked up; but he had a duplicate key, which you, dear Lady Jane, had given him, he said, years ago, when he was a boy and used to keep his fishing tackle there (old Giles was then the water bailiff, and lived in the cottage). If our being there created suspicion, Rupert said that the cave called the Crow's Nest, half-way down the cliff, might afford a hiding place for a time. But he hoped to get the Colonel across the water before any need arose for that, as it was a ticklish place to get at in the dark; and by daylight the descent must not be attempted. He knew several fishermen at Shingleton and Dummer, who, he was sure, would help him, and could be trusted."

Cecil then related all that had passed since they reached the Cliff Cottage; the visit of the Cuffs, and the extra vigilance

along the coast, which made it more difficult than Rupert had anticipated, to communicate with any of the friendly fishermen. She told how Rupert at length decided upon going himself to Shingleton to look for the Flukes; how he had succeeded in mystifying the Cuffs; and, how, with the assistance of the Flukes, the Colonel had been safely removed to Hollowhill. "But he is very ill, Lady Jane," she said in conclusion; "fatigue, and the dread of capture, together with the dampness of the cave, and a severe cold brought on by exposure during the late inclement weather, have broken him down, body and mind. All the coolness and daring which he displayed the night we left London are gone. Sickness and the fear of death are upon him; I never saw so great a change in so short a time."

"Is that all you have to tell me?"



asked Lady Jane, quietly, as though in pain.

“ All, I think. Oh, no! I had forgotten this.” She placed a packet in Lady Jane’s hand. “ These are papers of great importance, title - deeds and mortgages, Rupert told me. He suspected, from what the Colonel had said, that he had documents of this description about him, and he took them from him whilst he slept; but not liking to keep such documents in his own possession, as, if found upon him they would tell to his disadvantage, he desired me to give them to you, and request you to take charge of them until the Colonel should be safe, when he will himself deliver them up to their rightful owner.”

Lady Jane received the packet in silence; rising from her seat, she walked slowly and feebly across the room, and opening an

escritoir, deposited it there, locked it up carefully, and returned to Cecil. She was deadly pale, but quite calm.

“You had better go back with your uncle to Hollowhill now, my dear child,” she said, kissing her tenderly. “I want rest and time for thought; and strength, not only to bear this misfortune, but to act—for much remains to be done. That unfortunate man must not go away a beggar, to die in a foreign workhouse. I have a great deal to say to you, my child, but I cannot say it now. How can I thank you enough for all that you and Rupert have done and suffered for me and mine; Rupert especially: a lifetime of gratitude could not repay him for the noble self-sacrifice he has made. Come to my arms once more, Cecil, and then leave me.” She strained her to her breast. “My own child, had she been spared, could scarcely have

been dearer to me than you are," she murmured.

Cecil returned Lady Jane's affectionate embrace, and immediately left the room, followed by her uncle.

"Why, Cecil, that 'ere Colonel Dimdale must be a desp'rate villin!" were the first words uttered as they sped towards the hall door.

There could be but one answer to so obvious a truism.

"Come," continued the good man; "we must look sharp an' get back to Hollowhill, or Dame Dorothy will be about our house, I know."

They hurried on, but ere they reached the door, the gigantic figure of Mrs. Bliss barred their further progress.



## CHAPTER XII.

### "THE ROOM" AT THE BOOKERY.

**H**AVING used the word "gigantic" in reference to Mrs. Bliss, I am fearful that I may have conveyed a false impression with regard to that worthy lady. We generally associate power and strength—even fierceness—with large proportions. You have probably figured to yourself an exceedingly stout Meg Merrilies, with an incipient beard, a harsh low voice, and a bold stare; if so, you have done this lady great injustice. Mrs. Bliss was a blonde with a very delicate complexion, in spite of the kitchen fire before which she had done

duty for thirty years; her voice was low, and she herself, notwithstanding her great height and magnificent personal development, was—in her own estimation at all events—an exceedingly delicate and feeble person.

She had waylaid Farmer Danger and Cecil that she might learn "the ins and outs of it," as she told them.

Mrs. Bliss had of course known of Colonel Dimdale's and Rupert's misfortunes some hours previous to the arrival of the farmer and his niece at the Rookery. She had, however, prudently forborne to convey the painful intelligence to her lady, and had even succeeded in inducing her ladyship's maid, Mrs. Bounce, to keep silence on the subject, an achievement which all who thoroughly understand the immense difficulties involved in gagging a lady's maid will duly appreciate.

Why is it that servants always know what is going on, so very much sooner than their masters and mistresses? That they do, is an acknowledged fact, but I never heard it satisfactorily accounted for. I confidently appeal to any and every lady who may condescend to skim these pages, whether her first intimation of passing events has not, as a rule, been conveyed at the mystic toilet, through the medium of her wily abigail.

With equal confidence I appeal to each and every abigail to confirm, as I am certain she will, my settled conviction that it is utterly impossible either to comb, brush, or plait a lady's hair in silence. Whether or no flowing tresses be suggestive of flowing speech, I cannot say; or whether there be any magnetic and subtle influence contained in heavy masses of silken hair, which, communicated to the fingers whereon it

rests, rushes incontinently through the delicate organization of the human conductor, until finally, it reaches and sets going that much abused but greatly valued member, the tongue. I leave the solution of this enigma to magnetizers, mesmerizers, spirit-rappers, and chancellors of the exchequer, believing that those who practise illusions on a grand scale, can more readily and more satisfactorily deal with supernatural agencies, than a mere common mortal like myself.

Mrs. Bliss *loquitur* :—

“Now Mr. Danger, now Miss Cecil, I ask your pardon, ma’am, Mrs. Vicars—I should say, just step into the room, and tell me and Mrs. Bounce all about it. Poor Mrs. Bounce, she have been very good, I will say that, never said a word to my lady, though she’s dressed her and undressed her twice, that’s once this morn-

ing and once last night, since we first heard about the Colonel's and Mr. Rupert's misfortunes."

There was no resisting this thirst for knowledge ; the more especially as Cecil thought it highly probable that rumour had made matters even worse than they were, particularly with regard to Rupert.

In " the room " they found Mrs. Bounce and the butler.

Larry Doyle was very like his daughter Catherine, with whom you are acquainted ; he had been born and bred on the Rockmoor Castle estate, and considered himself quite as one of the family, into whose service he had entered at the age of twelve years in the capacity of " odd boy," his principal duties at that time consisting in bringing turf for the kitchen fire, sweeping the stable-yard, weeding the walks, and playing with the house-dog. In those days



a tangled mass of hair hung over his eyes; much after the fashion of a Skye-terrier's—down which the rain ran, as down the back of a duck, for the lad Larry scorned a hat; and his brown feet paddled noiselessly through the moist grass, or the thick mud.

This description of the past may seem unnecessary. It is given for the purpose of encouraging the hatless and shoeless youths of Great Britain and Ireland: as every private in the imperial army of the first Napoleon was said to carry the possible *bâton* of a Field-Marshal in his knapsack, so may each village urchin contain within his ragged and patched doublet the elements of success in that path of life in which it has pleased God to place him.

Mrs. Bounce was essentially a thin woman; not only was her figure of the sparest, but her hair, nose, lips, and voice

were also decidedly thin. She performed an elaborate and patronizing curtsey to Cecil as she entered; of Mr. Danger she took no notice.

"This is Mrs. Bounce, I suppose," said Cecil, turning to the housekeeper; "pray sit down, Mrs. Bounce; do not let me keep you standing."

"Yes, ma'am; this is her ladyship's new maid; she came down with my lady from London, after your wedding, ma'am."

"You are very fortunate in having so kind and good a mistress, Mrs. Bounce," said Cecil, in a voice and with a look that defied familiarity.

Mrs. Bounce, in spite of herself, dropped a common, humble curtsey and sat down thoroughly subdued. This *hauteur* on Cecil's part was necessary, and she had perceived at a glance that it was so. Mrs. Bounce had heard Cecil's history from

Mrs. Bliss, and she knew the Dangers by sight, having seen the Hollowhill party at Church the preceding Sunday; indeed Lady Jane had stopped on her way to her carriage, after the service, and had spoken to them all for some minutes; a species of condescension by no means palatable to Mrs. Bounce, for she was one of those unfortunate people who cannot bear that another should be noticed more than herself. Who were these farmers, after all, that Lady Jane should make such a fuss about them? she was sure she, Mrs. Bounce, was in a much higher position than vulgar Mrs. Danger, whose clothes looked as if they had been made for somebody else. Did ever anyone see such a skirt! scarcely below her knees—it wasn't decent—and then her bonnet!—it might have been her grandmother's, if she ever had a grandmother; such an old "dowd," all grey and brown—

to be made so much of. Mr. Danger was too insignificant a person to be regarded by Mrs. Bounce with any other feeling than that of pity or contempt. Jane Danger was plain enough to pacify even her; besides, her lady took slight notice of Jane; but Grace Meadows! tall, handsome Grace Meadows, with whose dress it was impossible to find fault, and whose hand Lady Jane had held in hers for several minutes, she, poor unconscious girl, excited the gall and moved the bitterness of Mrs. Bounce to the utmost: "A stuck-up minx, a farmer's niece to give herself such airs, to even herself with the quality! She would give her a piece of her mind, as sure as eggs was eggs (Mrs. Bounce only used such vulgarisms in soliloquies), if ever she came across her." The constant praises of Cecil, which were daily poured into her ears by Mrs. Bliss and Larry Doyle, exas-

perated her still more. Lady Jane might do as she pleased ; if she chose to demean herself to her inferiors, she, Mrs. Bounce, would do nothing of the sort ; she would let Mrs. Vicars know that she considered her no better than herself, if so good ; she had no notion of people setting themselves up above their betters. She'd take her down a peg, she'd warrant, if she tried any of her airs and graces upon her.

The patronizing curtsy before mentioned was the result of this heroic resolution, formed under the erroneous impression conveyed by the soft eyes and blushing cheeks of Grace ; but when Cecil's proud look and steady gaze met her supercilious simper, her heart died within her. She was half defeated at the first glance, and was so confused that she nearly lost her balance whilst performing the elaborate obeisance she had taken such pains to

acquire by private practice before her lady's glass. Cecil's words, so quietly condescending, completed her discomfiture: and she sank into her seat in silent obedience to the command of her superior. She was, however, not destined to remain there; her lady's bell rang, and Mrs. Bounce departed.

"How do you like the new maid, Mrs. Bliss?" asked Cecil.

"Well, miss, that is, ma'am, she has her good p'int's and she has her bad ones, Bounce has; her temper ain't the best in the world, but then we can't tell but what she's had her trials. She's been worn as thin as a lath by somethin', poor creatur. I'm sure it often makes my heart ache to see her poor saller cheeks an' pinched up mouth, as though she was half-starved, which indeed she is not, for she eats as much as me and Larry Doyle put together, doesn't she, Larry?"

"Faith, she does so; I niver see her aqual at the food; but it does her no good, she's like a potato garden with the blight on it, everything you put into it goes to waste."

Cecil smiled at Larry's uncomplimentary simile; it was evident that Mrs. Bounce was no favourite with him.

"I am glad she is engaged at present," said Cecil, "for I want to tell Mrs. Bliss, and you too, Larry, the truth about Colonel Dimdale and my husband, and I could not say all I wish before a person who knows nothing and cares nothing about the family." She then proceeded to enlighten her attentive hearers as to the nature of Colonel Dimdale's misdeeds, and of Rupert's entire innocence regarding them.

"Well, well! how this world is given to fibbing, to be sure!" ejaculated Mrs. Bliss, with uplifted hands. "Would you believe

it now, ma'am, we heard that the Colonel had committed a great robbery, and that Mr. Rupert was aiding and abetting of him? Some said it was a bank they broke into; others that they stopped a coach on Hounslow Heath, full of gold, with an old gentleman in it that they beat dreadful. Dear, dear! what a wicked world this is!"

"I thought that you had probably heard false reports; rumour always exaggerates. But such an absurd story as that! Surely, Mrs. Bliss, you did not believe that Mr. Rupert had turned highwayman?" said Cecil, indignantly.

Mrs. Bliss was confused; she certainly *had* believed the story; the bank breaking business she had discarded at once as too low and ignoble an occupation for gentlemen to engage in, but a dash at a carriage full of gold on Hounslow Heath was quite a different affair: there was more romance



and daring attached to that. Mrs. Bliss had five times carefully and admiringly read the "Life of Dick Turpin," and her admiration for the dashing, free-handed, polite highwayman had increased at the termination of each separate perusal. She was sorry he killed Black Bess, but then how could he help it? However, Dick Turpin had never ill-used any one, there was no mention of such an act in "the life," and therefore she did not believe that the Colonel and Rupert had beaten the old gentleman; *that* no doubt *was* an exaggeration. And so, upon this belief she took her stand.

"Dear heart! no, Miss Cecil—to be sure not; neither me nor Larry believed a word about Mr. Rupert's beating the poor old gentleman; he who is always so kind and gentle to every one, big as he is."

"It's true for her we niver did," chimed

in Larry. "Misther Rupert, says I, niver riz hand to the ould gintleman. Thim's the first words I said."

"He never had anything to do with the robbery, which indeed is a pure invention," replied Cecil, proudly. "I have told you the real story, and, I repeat, I am surprised that you and Larry, who have known Mr. Rupert and his family so long, should have believed him capable of such infamous conduct as committing a robbery."

"Faith! I know well enough that Misther Rupert would niver do what's mane or onhandsome," said Larry, who saw that Cecil was hurt and offended; "but I jist thought it was a joke, maybe, of his and the Colonel's; shure I'd be very sorry to say anything to vex you or him, Miss Cecil—so I would!"

Mrs. Bliss protested also that she had never regarded the transaction in its true

light before, and asked pardon for her mistake.

Cecil, whose temper was as soon cooled as heated, was easily appeased. She knew how well she was loved by the two faithful old friends before her, and she blamed herself for taking offence where none was intended.

Mr. Danger had been fidgeting on his chair for some minutes and now interposed.

"Cecil," he said, "we ought to go: I'm afraid it's getting late, and Dame Dorothy 'll think as we're lost."

And so they took their departure, and left their characters to be discussed by their friends, who, strange to say, were more merciful to their departed guests than to themselves.

"Dear, dear, to think that I should go and wound that poor child's heart so!" sighed good-natured Mrs. Bliss. "I'm

sure I never thought of the unkindness of the thing; my mind was just running upon the beautiful black mare and the gallant horseman. I pictured Mr. Rupert to myself a-galloping across the heath with his sword drawn—or no, I think it's pistols they have—and the moon shining down on his handsome face, and he a-looking so grand."

"The very moral of the pictur I had in my own eye, Mrs. Bliss!" cried Larry; "may I niver stir but it is,—barrin' the cocked hat and feathers, which *my* Misther Rupert had on him."

"You are wrong there, Larry; highway-men never wear cocked hats and feathers. It would make them too conspicuous to them as they robbed—as they stopped, I should say, for they often give the money back again; but them as they stopped would know them again, you see,

if they dressed any way out of the common."

"Not with the crape veel on; you forgot the crape veel in your pictur, Mrs. Bliss!" said Larry, triumphantly; "*my* Mистер Rupert had a veel on, and a cocked hat—I'll kiss the book on it."

Mrs. Bliss was caught; she *had* forgotten the veil, which certainly was part of the equipment of an orthodox highwayman. But Larry had also made a *lapsus linguae*, so instead of defending her own, she adroitly attacked his mistake.

"What book are you talking of kissing, Larry?" she asked. "I thought you had done with such nonsense, years ago."

"An' so I have, Mrs. Bliss; faith! I'm as good a Protestant as yerself, but my tongue runs away wid me, bad look to it for an unruly mumber, as Parson Acre calls it; an' shure the holy man is right enough.

Maybe if he kept his own a bit stiller it would be as well."

" 'Holy man!' it's my belief that you're half a Roman this minute, Larry."

"No, no!" laughed Larry, "I cut that consarn and my wisdom teeth the same day; but it was a mistake to call Misther Acre 'holy,' and I beg to withdraw the terrum; an' now I'll go clane my plate."

Mrs. Bliss also arose to see after household affairs; and as she dragged her large weary frame along, she declared "she was as weak as water, and more fit for bed than the kitchen, she was that tired with talking and listening."

Dinner is over in the servants' hall, and the three upper servants are discussing their ale and cheese in "the room." Mrs. Bounce has been more snappish than usual, and her sallow face bears a still darker tinge upon it, signs that a storm is brewing.

It burst, amidst the bread and cheese aforesaid.

“And so that was your famous Mrs. Vicars, was it?” Mrs. Bounce’s thin lips trembled as she spoke, but as the question was addressed to neither of her companions in particular, neither answered.

“Some people’s geese are always swans,” she continued; here came a flash at Mrs. Bliss. Then another stab, “For my part, Hi never see a commoner-looking piece of goods.”

Larry’s eyes twinkled, not with fury, as might have been expected, for he was quick tempered, like most of his race, but with fun. Had any one else ventured to abuse Cecil in his presence, he would have fired up immediately; but Mrs. Bounce’s impertinence and ill-humour invariably acted upon his risible, never upon his irascible muscles. You have probably felt

the same. There is some one person who constantly moves your mirth, never your anger; do or say what he (or she) will, you can never see the act or the speech from any other than a ludicrous point of view. This idiosyncrasy on your part is far from complimentary to the aggressor, and anything but soothing to feelings which, naturally irritable, are at that particular time in a more excitable state than usual, whether with or without cause, it matters not.

Now the cuticle of Mrs. Bounce's temper—at the best of times no better than gold-beaters' skin—had been quite rubbed off in the spot where vanity lay, by the snubbing that she had received from Cecil. You will readily imagine then, that Mrs. Bounce, being in the state above described, would far rather have been quarrelled with than laughed at; and I mention Larry's peculiarity in that respect as some sort of an



apology, or at all events of explanation of Mrs. Bounce's subsequent conduct.

"Well, now, it's strange," he said, with a merry look in his eyes, "when Mrs. Vicars and you was standing side by side, jest before she ordered you to sit down, I said to myself, says I, 'How like they two are, to be shure;' didn't I now, Mrs. Bliss?"

"Dear me, Larry Doyle, I'm sure I never heard you!" replied the astonished house-keeper.

"Well, it's no matter. Barrin' a few p'int's o' difference here and there, of no consequence, Mrs. Vicars an' Mrs. Bounce might be sisters."

Oh, flattery! flattery! flattery! I could fall down and worship thee for thy brazen impudence. Thou art no midnight burglar, no secret assassin, shunning the crowded thoroughfares, and prowling in

solitary paths or dark passages, ready to pounce on the unwary, and to steal stealthily into ill-guarded houses; but thou, in broad daylight, in the face of all men, boldly marchest into the human citadel, be it never so well guarded. And thou takest our gold, our pearl of price, our little bit of humility, and our little bit of common sense, into thy keeping, and then thou sittest down and makest love to our vanity before our very face: thou embracest her, praisest her beauty, and thou pourest liquid lies into her willing ears, and she bridles and simpers and smirks, and believes every word thou sayest.

Exactly so did Mrs. Bounce simper and smirk at Larry Doyle's last observation. You think his flattery too broad, too transparently false, to be believed even by the vainest of the vain. Alas, alas! flattery too broad to be swallowed, too transparent to be con-

cealed, has never yet been discovered. Mrs. Bounce, then, bridled and smirked, for although in her anger she had abused Cecil's appearance, she knew well enough that she was a remarkably handsome, distinguished looking woman; consequently she fell headforemost into the trap laid by the perfidious Larry.

"Oh, now, Mr. Doyle, you must be joking, I'm sure. Why, Mrs. Vicars is a 'ead and shoulders taller than me; and besides, she is a few years younger, you know."— She was twenty years younger, if a day.

"She doesn't look it thin, Mrs. Bounce," replied Larry, with unblushing effrontery. "But I said there was one or two p'int's o' difference between you, not worth mentioning."

"And what may they be, Mr. Doyle? Mrs. Vicars's 'air is about the same colour as mine, I think."

"The difference atween you ain't worth

mentioning; will I give you another glass of ale, mam?"

Mrs. Bounce bowed gracefully, and her glass was refilled.

Mrs. Bliss—who had feared an outbreak, and a consequent interruption to the usual after-dinner nap in which she indulged in order to recruit her exhausted frame—was charmed at the prospect of peace so unexpectedly presented to her. She sighed a sigh of relief from threatened danger, and, leaning back in her arm-chair, prepared herself for a doze—a doze she was fated to enjoy but for a moment. Scarcely were her eyes closed, than she heard Mrs. Bounce say in the most coaxing and wheedling tone of which her tin-attuned voice was capable—

"Come now, Mr. Doyle, *do* tell me what those little differences are between me and Mrs. Vicars. You know we ladies are always

curious to know what the gentlemen think of us, and you are a good judge, I'm sure."

Larry's eyes twinkled more than ever, but no other feature in his face laughed; he spoke with the utmost gravity.

"Them slight distinkshins I spoke of, if you are determined to hear them, are jest;—but maybe you might be offended at me taking the liberty of drawing comparishons between you, which I've always heard tell are counted ojus by the quality."

"Indeed, no!" cried Mrs. Bounce, more and more pleased at every word uttered by the wily Larry. "P'rhaps it's in hexpression that we differ. Come now, Mr. Doyle, have I guessed right?"

"Partly in exprisshion, partly in faytures." Here Larry stopped again.

"Oh, you tiresome man; how you do tease. Mrs. Vicars's lips are thicker than mine; I remarked that she had thick lips—

is that it? Come now, I insist on knowing half you thought of us."

"Faith! if you insist on knowing, in course I must tell you—but mind, it's your own fault if you're vexed."

"Oh, *Hi* shan't be vexed; I'm above being vexed at trifles."

"Well thin, here it is, if you will have it. What I says is, that you are the very moral of Cecil Vicars; barrin' your insignificant figure, yer yaller skin, yer foxy hair, yer red nose, an' yer blue lips."

Had Mrs. Bounce been a stout woman of a plethoric habit, that moment must have been her last; as it was, the rush of blood to the head, entirely destroyed Larry's picture. Her whole face was in a flame, not a tinge of yellow remained; she seized the jug of ale, and without a word—for words were worthless—she launched it at the aggressor's head; he, adroitly ducking,

avoided the impending blow, and on hurtled the jug into the capacious lap of the unconscious Bliss, who starting up from her incipient slumber, cried, "Lord save us!" and stared wildly around.

Shouts of laughter from the incorrigible Larry, and the slam of the door behind the retreating form of the wrathful Bounce, were her only answers.

You who have been in agonies for the handsome silk dress of Mrs. Bliss, will be glad to hear that there was no ale in the jug.

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